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**Meykhana – The poetics of time and space**

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## Abstract

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Right before the rhythmic, improvisational and poetic genre called *meykhana* was forbidden to practice in Soviet Azerbaijan, it bloomed for a short time in the beginning of previous century, and can be met in the files of theatre repertoires from that time and in a few books printed between 1919 and 1930. This period is the first time the name of the genre, *Meykhana*, is met. Due to its prohibition the terms *kupletlər* (couplets) and *satirik kupletlər* (satirical couplets) has been used as a replacement for the public name of the genre. Although it has found a revival after the resolution of the Soviet Union, it is still commonly regarded as belonging to low culture. A practice generally known for being appreciated by young men from Baku and its suburbs gained national status in recent history: is started to become broadcasted by national TV channels and has become a subject for debates. The genre entered the young and free market in the surface of new capitalism, which had great significance to its recent development. While in Azerbaijan *meykhana* today is a popular cultural phenomenon, the Azerbaijani minority in Georgia practises a religious ceremony mainly by same name.

This thesis is an initial attempt to give a literary account of this poetic improvisational genre. My field study started with the aim to observe, interview, collect and analyze texts and stanzas all within the Azerbaijani context, which is characterized by the fact that until recently it was a peripheral part of the Soviet Union. The first part of the thesis makes objective generalisations of the poetic and structural qualities of the genre, whereas the second part gives serious attention to field-grounded observations, as both being central methodologies in the modern philology.

The project has ended with two final results: The master's thesis for University of Oslo and a book "*The Poetics of Meykhana*" (in Azerbaijani: *Meyxananın poetikası*), published together with the folklorist Nizami Tağısoy.

## Notes on transliteration and language

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This thesis describes modern literature, therefore older literary sources in Cyrillic and Arabic script are presented in Latin transcription. All references except English and Scandinavian are introduced in original and English, translated by me unless otherwise stated. Poems will be presented in the text in the original and in English translation. Quotes exceeding two sentences will be given as footnotes, also quotations from field interviews and conversations. Geographical names are given in English as they appear in English maps. Some literary and Sufi terminology of Arabic and Persian origin such as *medjlis*, *ghazel* etc. are also given in the form they are usually found in English.

All letters of Azerbaijani Latin alphabet are pronounced as they are in English except:

C c a voiced palatal affricate (IPA<sup>1</sup> [ɟʃ]) as in *jazz*.

Ç ç an unvoiced palatal affricate (IPA [tʃ]) as in English in *change*

Ə ə a low unrounded vowel between [a] and [e]: (IPA [æ]), corresponds to English *a* in the word *cat*

Ğ ğ this letter may represent an voiced uvular fricative (IPA [ɣ]), but in most positions it has no realization of its own, but lengthens the preceding vowel.

X x a postvelar unvoiced fricative (IPA [x])

I ı a high back unrounded vowel (IPA [ɯ])

J j a voiced palatal fricative (IPA [ʒ]) like in French *jour*.

Q q a postvelar unvoiced stop (IPA [q]), which, however, sometimes may be realized as a fricative

Ö ö a low front rounded vowel (IPA [œ]) like in German *hören*.

Ş ş an alveolar unvoiced sibilant (IPA [ʃ]) like in English *short*.

Ü ü a high front rounded vowel (IPA [y]) like in German *führen*.

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<sup>1</sup> International Phonetic Alphabet

## Acknowledgment

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First of all to Bernt Brendemoen, for asking right questions, for his interest to my projects, his patient feedbacks and comments and his unlimited understanding of the importance of academic freedom.

To Baku Slavic University professors and students for contributing with their archive materials, findings and their patient help with transliterations from Arabic alphabet to Latin of the pre- and early Soviet texts.

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I thank professors and library staff of Turkology institute at Freie Universität Berlin.

My all time biggest gratitude goes to my informants, especially performers. I wish some day they get acknowledgement and appreciation as other artists in their brave choice of profession.

My friends Gunn Camilla Stang, Karen Leren Wathne, Gunvald Ims, Jens Hjort, Barry Kavanagh, Tatu Metsätähti and Aimo among others for their never-ending support and ears.



## Pictures

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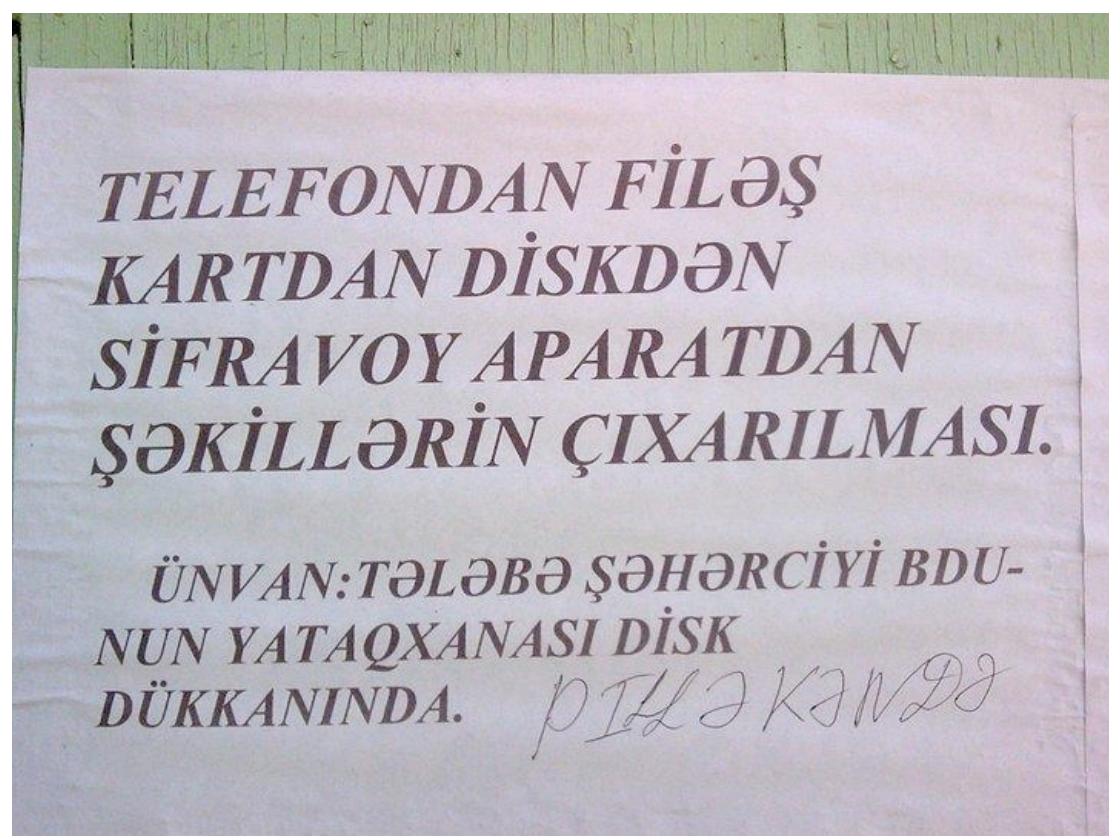
Here four meykhana performers battle. Carpet behind is decorated with the "Congratulations with wedding" words. Cyrilic script is used, although those performers are new faces in meykhana scene. Video is uploaded on November 6th, 2008.

Screen capture of the video uploaded in the webpage.

22.04.2011: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TahPKXIFd0A>

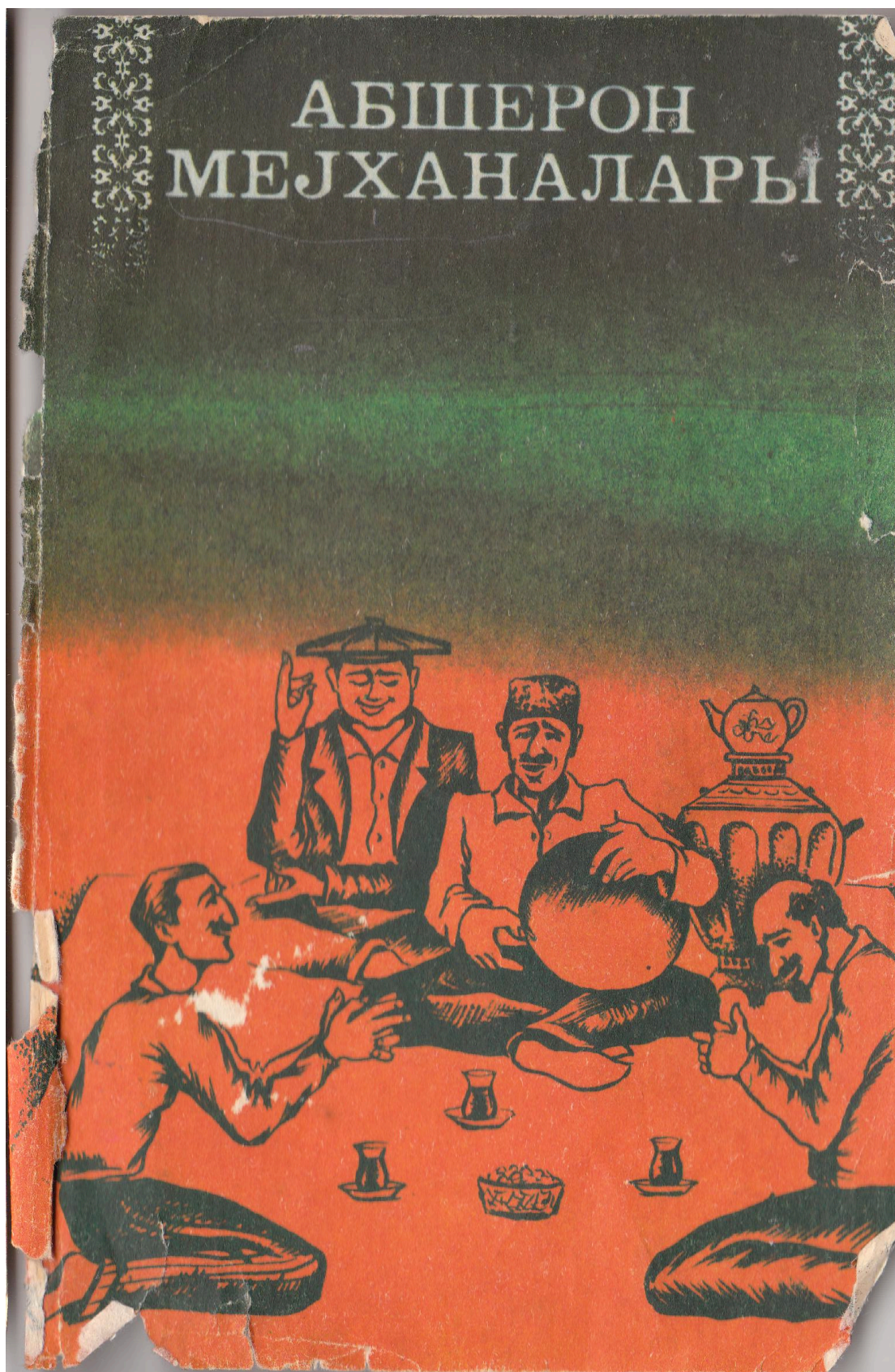


Meykhana audience in the wedding.  
Screen capture from the abovementioned video.

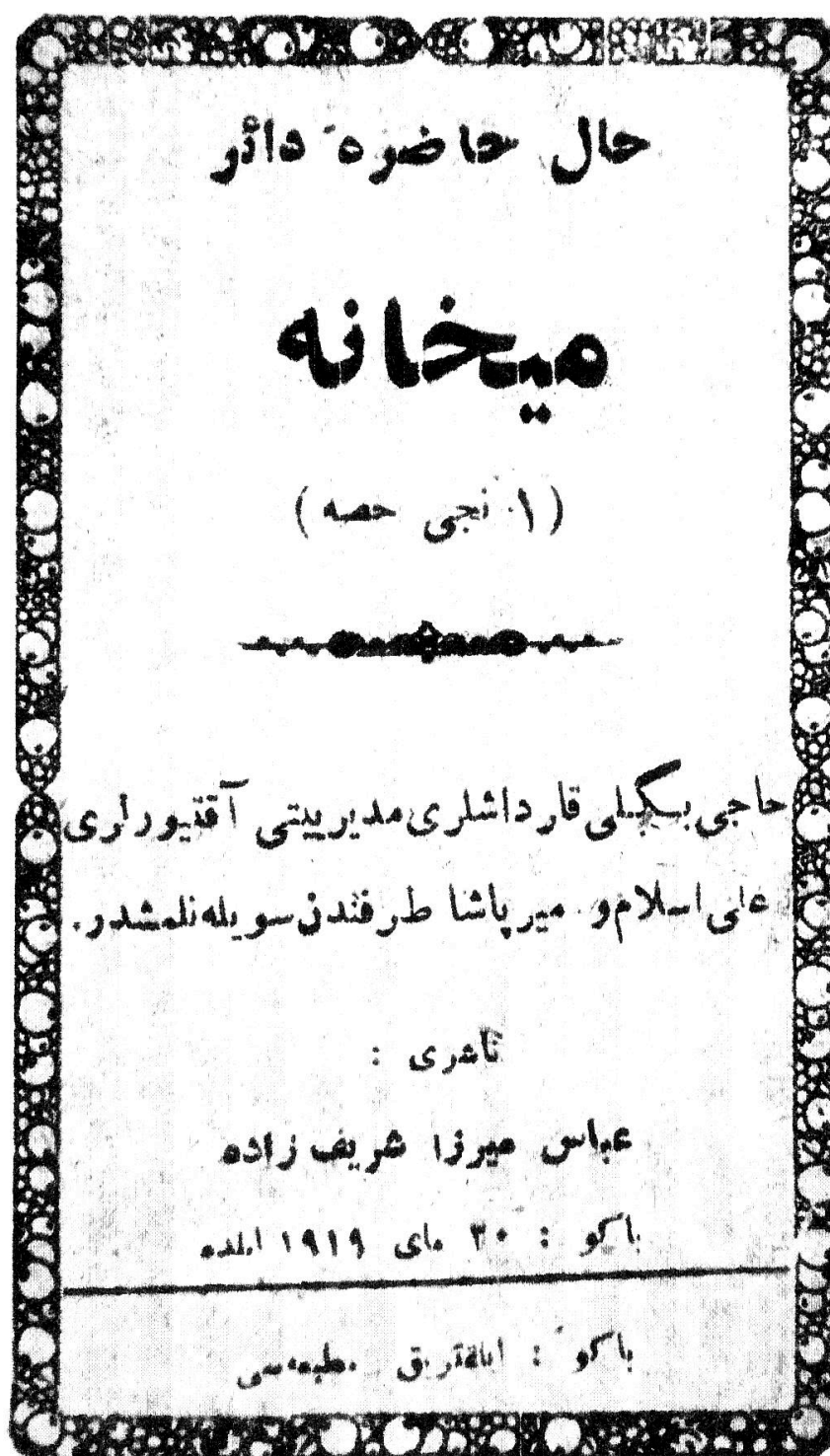


Here the author of the sign, which I found hanging on the door of an internet café not only applies and misspells some Azerbaijani and foreign words, but uses them with Azerbaijani grammatical structures in a way that readers understand the message easier than that if he/she would choose only Azerbaijani words, e.g., *filəş kart* for the English *flash card*, and *sifravoy* for Russian word цифровой meaning *digital*, Translation: *Development of pictures from flash card, from disc, from digital devices. The address: In the disc shop of the dormitory of the Baku State University. Retail* [handwritten and misspelled]





Abşeron Meyxanaları (1993). In the book cover traditional meykhana gathering is illustrated. One of participants holds a hand drum, other three are snapping fingers.



First published meykhana book cover.

Hal hazırda dair MEYXANƏ (1-ci hissə) Hacıbəyli qardaşları müdriyyəti aktyorları Əli İslam və Mirpaşa tərəfindən söylənilmişdir. Nəşəri: Abbas Mirzə Şərifzadə Bakı: 20 may 1919-cu ildə, Bakı: Elektrik mətbəsi

تورک سەنەسە - آقئۆمری احمد آناتوللی نىڭ

يازدىغى قۇپلەتلەر

== «شاپالاق» ==



بەئىر 1927 نەچى يىل

Some of book covers provide also pictures of the authors. Here the term *meykhana* was replaced with the term *couplets*.

Türk Səhnəsinin aqtyorları Əhməd Anatollinin yazdığı qupletlər "ŞAPALAQ", 3-ncü hissə, Baku-1927-nci yıl.



APXMB

AKTJÖR ƏHMƏD ANADOLLYNUN

KYPLETLƏRI

894.362-2

A 61

56

ÇYVALDYZ

II təb'i

Azərbaycan Milli Kezi  
Dövlət Kitabxanası  
5267

AZƏRNƏŞR  
Bağ-1930

03497

Last published book belonging to pre- and early Soviet literature of meykhana. As seen, this book is published in Latin Script, used in 1930.

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# 1 Introduction

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*It is in the late hours of a groom's wedding party in suburban Baku. The party tent, which is set up in the yard, is filled with men in black suits. Tables have been taken away to create more space. In the front there are six or seven men. Some are standing, others sitting. They are improvising a rhythmic, jovial, rhyming poetry, to synthesizers set on a repeating rhythm. They are performing meykhana. The microphone goes from one performer to the next. The audience listens carefully to the improvisation. Occasionally, they applaud, laugh, cheer and shout, to show appreciation for what they hear.*

The name of this genre comes from the designation of traditional Turkic/Persian Mediaeval public wine houses and taverns, which in turn originates from two Persian words: *mey* (wine) and *hāne* (house). In Ottoman literature these are commonly regarded as Sufi lodges and places for religious gatherings or musical and poetic venues, mainly of ethno-linguistic communities, where both indigenous inhabitants and immigrants could gather (Ágoston & Masters 2008: 407). The form of the word today in Azerbaijani<sup>2</sup> is *meyxana*<sup>3</sup>. I will use the form *meykhana* in this thesis in order to avoid confusion with the phonological value of the English letter x. The corresponding verb for the action of *to utter meykhana* is *demək* e.g. *meyxana demək* (to tell, to say *meykhana*) rather than *oxumaq* (to sing, also to read). Moreover the performers are not referred to as *muğənni* (singer) or *xanəndə* (soloist) but as *meyxanaçı* (meykhana performer), *şair* (poet), and *qəzəlxan* (*ghazel*<sup>4</sup> master), among other terms. The word *meykhana* as a winery or pub (as in Turkish) does not exist in Azerbaijani language today. The words *çayxana* (tea house) and *pab* (pub) cover that.

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<sup>2</sup> Azeri and Azerbaijani are used inconsistently to mean a language, a people and as an independent adjective. I will be using Azerbaijani for all three relations since I associate Azeri with the ethnic group. Azerbaijan has been fortunate with Kurds, Jew, Tatar, Lezgi and Avar minorities among others who have considered them selves to be Azerbaijanis and speak the same language. It is more in accordance with the purpose of this thesis to relate to the Azerbaijani people and not to the Azeri ethnic group. Furthermore, I have not asked which ethnic group my informants belong to.

<sup>3</sup> Orthographically, the word *meyxana* has been used by Azerbaijanis as *meyhanə* [meyhanæ] and not as *meyxana* [meykhana]. The different vowel realizations in the last syllable represent a frequent phonological change. Other examples of words with double realizations are *dəstan-dastan*, *Nərdaran-Nardaran* and *çayhanə-çayxana*. Both the back vowel and the postvelar realization of the fricative (x) may be caused by a desire to adjust the word to Russian use, since the sounds ə [æ] nor h [h] do not exist in Russian, but the backed final vowel in *meyxana* could also be a result of subordinating the word to Turkic vowel harmony, which is an absent quality in Persian, from which both words *mey* and *xanə* originate. Additionally, some of my informants refer to the genre as *meyxanə* [meykhanæ].

<sup>4</sup> Ghazels: eastern love poetry, applying the Arabic-Persian prosodic meter of *aruz*.

However, the word *meykhana* must have had meaning of wine house also in Azerbaijan once. It is possible that this form of poetic battling which we witness in the genre *meykhana* has its origin in the gathering where poetic battling were possible after a glass of wine. From a soteriological point of view, in Sufi and Hurufi doctrines, the polysemy *mey* (wine) has metaphorical meanings relating to a spiritual intoxication, or an intoxication in the name of God. In this sense wine can carry a wide range of meanings. It is worth noting that *meykhana* and *tekke* poetry (religious poetry) have been used synonymously in some lexical sources. (Haciyeva & Rihtim 2009: 216). Taking that into consideration one can argue that prayers, consisting of dances, music and poetry as popular customs in former times, have been connected to the development of the genre. Most of the literature that exists about the genre claims that *meykhana* is part of a religious poetic tradition, especially Sufi and Hurufi poetry, usually performed at different gatherings of wise men (in Azerbaijani: *ariflər məclisi*) and having a religious content. Considering the fact that *meykhana*'s content today is humorous, an inevitable question arises: how did the content of *meykhana* change so drastically, from religious odes to humorous, critical and opinionated personal messages in the form of social poetic and rhyming debate? Here it should be mentioned that connecting local customs to religion should be seen as strategically ideological nationalistic behaviour. Finding alternative sources of legitimacy has become a necessity for the newly empowered. Alternative ideologies, which would now substitute Soviet thinking, have mostly religious and nationalistic content. For Central Asian Muslim countries, this has been manifest as a rediscovery of a glorious and honourable national history (Kolstø 2000: 72).<sup>5</sup> These strategic trends apply to *meykhana*, and I will criticize most obvious of assumptions made by scholars during this thesis.

It is known by anyone who has been in an Azerbaijani home or at an Azerbaijani gathering that Azerbaijanis use anecdotes, stories, poetry and humour socially, usually at the dinner table. *Meykhana* is part of a such tradition, but belonging rather to large gatherings, such as weddings. As a vocal genre, with humorous (and also obscene) qualities, all my informants insist that *meykhanas*<sup>6</sup> have traditionally been

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<sup>5</sup> Although Azerbaijan is geographically in Europe, Kolstø considers the country to be socio-politically Central Asian.

<sup>6</sup> I have decided to use a term *meykhana* henceforth in English, i.e. one *meykhana*, two *meykhanas* but *meykhana* for the genre.

accompanied by the snapping of fingers. The most widespread form has been the satirical stanzas expressing socio-political thoughts, with a didactic nature through dialogue in which the performers follow up on each other's verses. This dialogue is also called battle, in Azerbaijani *deyişmə* (also *atışma*). These battles usually take place between the performers but the audience can interact with the performances by suggesting rhymes or themes to battle about. Performers usually refer to personal experiences, taking on the role as observers of society. The development between verses and performers can remind one of Socratic conversations, in which the process of seeking out the truth happens through dialogue, arguments, agreements, understandings and reflections. Texts of *meykhanas* are improvised. Improvisation is a frequently used element in local artistic traditions. It is also existing in poetic parts of Azerbaijani folklore and classical art, for instance in the genre *ashiq/ashug*<sup>7</sup> (which will be discussed below when I comment on the similarities between *ashiq* poetry and *meykhana*) and the classical modal *mugam* (in Azerbaijani: *muğam*) genre. Naroditskaya describes that feature as *interplay of formulae and improvisation, a dichotomy between poetry and music, the combination of artistic individuality and tradition, performance and perception* (Naroditskaya 2002: 45). In *mugam*, part of the music is improvised, and samples of poetry (usually well-known ghazels), which are fixed texts, are then applied to it. A singer creates the improvisation and through that a mood is created which becomes the basis for which *ghazel* he/she will use. Usually which *ghazel* will be applied is not known beforehand, since it is entirely dependent on that mood created. In *meykhana*, as opposed to *mugam*, the rhythm is fixed and the performer will improvise a poetic piece into the fixed rhythmic features.

*Meykhana* grew (and is growing), and found its popularity after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and today occupies a popular position in local media. The genre was forbidden during the Soviet era. The exact reason for this is unknown to me. Jazz was also forbidden for many decades and Jazz musicians were targeted as anti-Soviet and counter-revolutionary (Naroditskaya 2002: 216). This also may be the case with *meykhana*, together with it being associated with an emancipatory religious project as well as its social critical content. Despite censorship, all of my informants grew up during the Soviet era and both witnessed and attended *meykhana* in daily life. In 1967

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<sup>7</sup> In Azerbaijani: *aşıq*. A vocal genre accompanied with a string instrument called a *saz*. Henceforth the form *ashiq* will be used.

it was performed on Azerbaijani Soviet radio by Hacı Kazım and Ələkber Şahid in a concert programme celebrating spring (Tağısoy & Zakariyya 2010: 25). In 1976, one of my informants who was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade in school performed *meykhana* verses on the school stage in front of the Soviet poet Süleyman Rustəm. Prohibition of the genre did not stop its presence in ceremonies, wedding parties<sup>8</sup>, jubilees, theatres, competitions, festivals and *meykhana* gatherings (in Azerbaijani: *meyxana məclisləri*)<sup>9</sup>. Prohibition forced it to rather change its public name to *kupletlər* and *satirik kupletlər*<sup>10</sup> – couplets and satirical couplets. Yet understandably, academic research of *meykhana* is absent during that period. Fieldwork-grounded descriptions that have emerged may assist us here. Thesis carries strong proximal methodological technic as an essential methodology of modern Turkology.

Being a phenomenon of modern Baku, with obvious historic roots, *meykhana* has gone a long way since being prohibited during Soviet rule to becoming immensely popular following the fall of it. The genre became a great business idea by being mediated on TV and radio shows and being a subject for Meykhana competitions similarly to *American Idol*. Most of the popular *meykhanas* today, are rhythmic and poetic battles. Those who perform the smartest, funniest, most up-to-date, or most beautifully rhyming *meykhana* will gain the admiration of the audiences, usually young men of suburban Baku. The same structures are used on competition-based television shows in which a winner is chosen at the end of a season, and where (at least theoretically) viewers send text messages to decide a winner (see the section on *De Gəlsin*). Here the majority of audience consists of men, but there are also women. The genre lives most actively, though, in the area of private weddings and gatherings so called medjlises<sup>11</sup> and that is also the main source of income for the professional performers. *Meykhanas* depend very much on context, which means that they can be performed spontaneously on any street corner, backyard, on the shores of the Caspian Sea etc. as long as it is requested. One of the most obvious characteristics of both types of *meykhana*, so-called *show* (mediated on TV and radio channels) and *authentic meykhana* (privately organised), is that they both have the inherent entertainment value of a narrative: they have to appeal to the masses to be successful

<sup>8</sup> Grooms' wedding parties are the main arenas for *meykhanas*.

<sup>9</sup> Gatherings with the main purpose of performing *meykhana*.

<sup>10</sup> Anatollu, Qupletlər (1925), Anadolunun kupletləri *Çuvalduz* (1930)

<sup>11</sup> Medjlis- A gathering of poets, musicians and philosophers, also a school (Naroditskaya 2002: 222)

and thus they depend on popular opinion and demand.

Today, the genre can be compared to hip-hop, in which performers can compete to win the audience's appreciation. However, the rhythmic aspects of these two genres are different. In recent times *meykhana* has been combined with popular songs, where performers feature well-known national popular artists. Here also, it has more or less copied the western pattern of development of the hip-hop scene, in which the poetic 'rapping' fills in between a melodic chorus.

As a body of work appreciated by youngsters in the Baku suburbs, *the poetic quality* of *meykhana* has been charged with more value than any other contemporary popular music, whether mugam, jazz or other genres. Yet *meykhana* has a low status within domestic culture, because of the apparently trivial and simple street language of young Bakuvian men, who have just not gained the same acknowledgement as other artists. Being propagated as the oldest custom, the root of other poetic genres such as *bayati*<sup>12</sup> or as *ashiq* poetry (Rəhimova 2003), it has not managed to get rid of its unsophisticated stereotypical character, being seen as a genre typical of young, warm-blooded and dissatisfied men expressing what they feel. Such stereotypical categorisations, expressed in a collective experience of a group such the abovementioned create motifs for the strategies, where researchers as myself can make assumption, in the environments where the genre is visible. To these environments I will mainly include the mediated scene: TV and radio shows, programs, competitions et al, private video clips uploaded on webpages. In that case it is interesting to look closely at how these stereotypes are created and how they might be broken down. However, the stereotype, together with the negative association of the term *meykhana* with wine houses and taverns, accordingly to alcoholism, which has inevitably played a role in the formation of the genre's *show* and *authentic* faces results in an on-going public debate over whether the name of the genre should be substituted for another (this will be discussed later). The former consists of professional and commercial practitioners who produce CDs and videos and participate in competitions on national public television channels, performing mediated *meykhana*, referred to by my informants as *şou meyxana*, that is, 'show' *meykhana*. Then there is the group that practices it at private events, weddings and

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<sup>12</sup> *Bayati*: folkloristic poetry consisting of four line, seven syllabuses. (Mirəhmədov 1998: 24)

gatherings, where recordings happen at random. This is similar to the practice of the genre during the Soviet era. The term *əsl meyxana*, ‘authentic’ *meykhana*, is often used by my informants and is synonymous with the *meykhana* practiced in environments where men drink, smoke and swear, the event being organised by individuals and not enterprises. *Meykhanas* that are performed at private weddings and celebrations should *not* however be considered underground *meykhana*, instead it is an arena for professional artists who are booked to perform and they make their living from it. An underground exists separately, and the lack of public awareness of voices from the underground occurs here. The term underground is disputed and can carry different meanings. One meaning is the arenas where there are no recordings and/or is pure improvisation. Here underground refers to *meykhana medjlises* whose purpose is solely to gather performers to improvise verses, and there is no financial remuneration for the performances. Those environments are not necessarily hidden or secret but two of my informants mentioned that there still exist, but decreasingly, underground *medjlises*, also referred to as *meykhana* dinners (e.g. *xingəl*<sup>13</sup> *məclisi*).

To quote one of my informants, ‘*Axşam xingələ gəl. Onda uje bilirik ne demək isteyir*’ (‘Come to a/the kxingal meal in the evening, and then we know what it means) – Hacı Əli.

One of my informants argued that the decrease in such arenas is not due to its political or oppositional character against a suppressive authoritative regime, but rather that financial and circumstantial reasons have led to its abatement. However, it would have been appropriate for me to attend underground *meykhana* performances, through which I could investigate what the term underground means in the *meykhana* context. Such observation would also have allowed for a comparison between what is happening in the media to what happens in the closed environments, away from recording studios and the commercial channels. Access to this underground, however, was unobtainable, as it was seen as unacceptable to invite a woman to a *meykhana* gathering.

This thesis is one of the first attempts to study the genre of *meykhana*, apart from the musicologist Aytac Rəhimova’s investigation of the genre’s presence in Azerbaijani music. The genre has not been an attractive subject for scholars until recently. It has

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<sup>13</sup>

A local dish.

not managed to engage folklorists, linguists or anthropologists, nor has it been assigned to folklore, oral folk traditions or classical poetry. This is not surprising, because the genre first appeared in the public sphere relatively recently. UNESCO's recognition of *mugam* and *ashiq* as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity creates an environment for international recognition of folkloric<sup>14</sup> cultural expression and has contributed to growing local awareness of it. Considering the late national(ist) trends in Azerbaijan's life, where the past, folklore and local customs have become one of the main stimuli for the sense of collectiveness, and where the collection, promotion and distribution of the ethnic, national, cultural and moral ideals of Azerbaijan have been at the centre of attention, *meykhana* also as a folkloric and classical form of art became a subject investigated in different TV and radio programmes, newspapers and magazines. Even a weekly fanzine, *Meyxana Gazeti* (the Meykhana Newspaper), was published (although this only had a short life, with twenty issues published weekly during six months in 2009, and was closed down, according to one of my informants, as a result of a conflict between performers and contributors).

### 1.1 Research questions

Taking the absence of theoretical study of the genre into consideration, my purpose, parallel to general objectifications in the theoretical part has been to undertake a survey of the source material and give an account of how the couplets of *meykhana* reflect the times of their creation ideologically, pragmatically or as entertainment, which will eventually answer the question arisen about how the content of the genre changes from religious to humoristic and obscene.

Nevertheless it is inevitable that my questions will become intertwined, concerning autonomic and heteronomic and methodological dimensions. My thesis is built around some questions that need to be answered in order to frame the internal and external links of the genre<sup>15</sup>. By framing the genre's references it will furthermore be

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<sup>14</sup> Folkloric is used 'Of, pertaining to, or having the character of folklore' and folkloristic as 'Characteristic of folklore'

<sup>15</sup> Links here are meant as references: internal: the characteristic aspects for *meykhana* which had an impact on the agents outside of *meykhana*, and external: aspects outside of *meykhana* (e.g. history, social life, also



interesting to see what kind of questions the genre demands and how to ask questions about the genre for further and deeper investigations.

The questions I have focused on are:

- *What is meykhana's form?* Its structure, compositional properties, content, motifs and themes.
- *How is it created and performed?* The contextual properties, staging and the setting of gatherings and parties.
- *How are the texts built and how do they produce their effects?* The devices performers use in order to tell their stories: language, code-switching,<sup>16</sup> dialects, jargons and the linguistic and performative tools used.
- *What can we say about its history and intertextuality?* A short cultural review and comparison with other genres.
- *What is the ethnographic setting of my analysis?* My fieldwork-grounded observations of local life of the genre and its participants.

During the thesis I will use terms such as mainstream, popular culture and battle. By mainstream and popular culture I primarily mean the branches of the genre that are mediated and widely covered by the media, such as TV and radio. A battle, monotonic, poetic, rhyming exchanges of verses between performers, is a term borrowed from hip-hop.

## 1.2 Theoretical framing and challenges

Description of poetry, performance and an artistic system cannot be studied incognizant of its operation within a new nation state, here a country standing in challenge to a colonial power against which its identity is defined. By placing the Caucasus within the map of Orientalism, some parallels can be drawn between Caucasus and colonial countries, discussed within Orientalism in order to develop the

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other genres and traditions) that had an impact on forming modern *meykhana*.

<sup>16</sup> Code-switching is a linguistics term meaning the simultaneous use of more than one language or linguistic variety, in conversation. People who speak several languages, sometimes use elements of several languages in conversations.

genre's contextual frame. The former USSR fits the definition of a dominating empire with Moscow at its core and the republics as peripheries, and at the beginning of this project I was interested in investigating aspects of the cultural genres belonging to colonized groups as Azerbaijanis. Starting this project ideologically inspired by the vociferousness of postcolonial theories and descriptions of the attributes of subaltern societies, I had in the beginning an idea of contributing to all of this by describing yet another voice of suppression using the language of resistance. For that purpose my pre-field interests were centred on forms of resistance and the dynamics between local cultural processes. But although the socio-critical and political content of *meykhana* lyrics at the beginning of the century was dominant and obvious, in the modern context that has become less relevant. *Meykhana* has perhaps been experiencing its most fruitful period as an art form since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and I can posit that this is not because of its oppositional content, although there is more than enough *meykhanas* to investigate within that frame of resistance. In the era of globalization and new capitalism in which open market policies hit the streets of the Baku suburbs, the genre acquired new meanings within a new context that has little to do with post-colonialism. The point is, viewing the material only through its status as a former counter-culture and the perspective of opposition would neglect the relevance of the genre's revival today. In fact that would also neglect the manner by which poets enjoy achieving some degree of artistic self-awareness through the genre. My awareness of that came during my field trip and the subsequent investigation period. Although I have been dealing with extensive qualitative interviews, to construct an impressive theoretical description would obscure the messages of my informants. As mentioned above, looking for oppositional or political messages both in the texts and interviews did not seem so relevant after a while. What is relevant is that something else has become the context for its production. You would not find *meykhanas* concerning the current political regime among the most-watched video clips. Having political messages, according to Hacı Əli, one of my informants, would create an unpleasant atmosphere, if the performer were booked to perform in an unfamiliar environment. The *meykhana* genre's revival could undoubtedly be an active code for resistance against any dominant culture. But how is dominant culture defined? Seeing that the so-called 'show' *meykhana* is the variant of the genre adopted by the dominant culture, is that 'dominant culture' in any way equivalent to the oppressed one of the imperial past?

There is a particular Western perspective in the analysis of the counter-culture movements of the Caucasus region in the post-Soviet era, in which a wide range of views are presented, but the trend is still to interpret these counter-culture movements in terms of their supposed political motivation. Region Caucasus, where most politics and history scholars have focused on national identity, interethnic relations, collective memory and political Islam (Darieva & Voronkov 2010: 22) cannot fully establish theoretical frames for its own study, since the region still exists as an ambivalent theoretical environment. The point is that the obsession of Western academia with reducing non-Western (in this case, ethnically non-Western, although geographically Western) culture to the question of dissent can potentially limit the study to that of binary oppositions. Within this *doxis* of socio-politically motivated interpretations, the dimension of patron-client traditions have often defined politics in the Caucasus (King, 226-228), and the academic sphere has been attracted to that. How hard one can try to describe the nuances of everyday life of Baku, it seems it has been challenging for Western scholars to consider the party and counter dimensions, not only the content and the objects of study but also the fields of study. While the existence of inequality is unquestionable, I wish to be more nuanced than the oft-mentioned observation of ramifications arising from being subordinated either as a Turkic minority in the Persian Empire or a peripheral republic in the Soviet Union. The academic answer to the Soviet binary oppositions has come from postmodernists, who fight with a priori assigning this powerless standing to study spheres. Among these are Steinholt Y. (2004), the newly conducted PhD dissertation of Wickström D. (2011) discussing musical environments and Yurchak A. (2005) discussing generally social and cultural everyday lives. However here it could be said that any thorough answer has yet to come. Yet the investigations of the abovementioned are also limited exercises: they all try to discuss the Soviet Union doing microanalyses within Russia (mainly St. Petersburg).<sup>17</sup> What should especially be criticized, especially in Yurchak and Steinholt, is the application of the term Soviet to a study done only in Russia with mainly ethnically Russian informants, giving an impression of a homogeneous Soviet Union, which is very false. Yurchak argues that the Soviet Union until its sudden demise was believed in and appreciated, as a result of the Russian Revolution.

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<sup>17</sup> However Wickström devotes some chapters in his dissertation (2011, 125-134) to a multicultural Berlin scene of Russian Disco (*Russendisko*), a popular club concept targeting Soviet immigrants and non-immigrants in Berlin within a Russian cultural and musical framework. The scene was extended over time to other cities such as Vienna and Oslo.

Yet analysis concentrated in Russia cannot be taken for granted in the Azerbaijani context even though the descriptions concern the Soviet Union. Russia's reality, conceptions of freedom, conceptions of Russian revolution and socialist ideologies are inevitably different from Azerbaijan's. While Yurchak's description of the Soviet Union gives nuances of the everyday lives of Russians and their genuine beliefs concerning socialist ideologies of collectiveness until its sudden end, for Azerbaijanis these realities had been the realities of the oppressor that forced them to change their alphabet, affect their language and to hide their religious practices, a reality in which the Russian language had dominant positions in the academic, political and social spheres, also in book production and publication. Without doing any research on the parallels and differences between Soviet Azerbaijani and Soviet Russian social lives, it is a very flimsy argument to suggest that an approach focused only on Russia could be directly transferred to the republics, especially the Caucasian republics, and even more to the Muslim Caucasian experience. My critique of the abovementioned has been shaped by time. This means that I was not occupying an ideologically different position when I initially studied these approaches and descriptions: what I have tried to do, similarly to Yurchak and Steinholt, is to focus on individual messages and descriptions of individual voices, but at the same time I have tried rather to focus on local qualities rather than state something for the country or Union. The approach supporting my argument has therefore been to concentrate on a regional and local approach rather than a national one, since approaching Azerbaijani culture from nation-state perspective offers also few challenges. Azerbaijani nation is a conglomerate of different cultures and traditions. It is a carrier of European values by having history of being a republic in European part of the Soviet Union, Caucasian minority of Turkic spoken area of the north-western part of the Persian Empire, which has come to be dominated with armed violence, tribalism, ethnic conflicts, brutality, and civil wars (Darieva & Voronkov 2010: 22). It is a carrier of Zoroastrian beliefs followed by Islam, which has been its religion until communism. Those agents are ethnically, historically, normatively different. One peculiarity of the region is that there is little cultural homogeneity, as I see it. Therefore, this thesis will allow doing generalisation only if I successfully focus on local and regional than national arguments.

Yet, concerning sources of local origin, and discussing the sources within

postmodernism combining post-Soviet and post-colonial studies, one dichotomy appears. Azerbaijanis are a people who are proudly attracted to their past and today apply it in national projects, rather than being – as postmodernism suggests – able to look to the future, without ignoring the past (Kamal 2008: 9). This has prevented postmodernism from blooming locally. In any event postmodernism has gone into disuse in academic spheres and has mostly acquired negative connotations (Ibid: 7). Under the comparative light any postmodern approach to local genres and agents would support my investigation in terms of searching for a common denominator in the establishment of the genre's theoretical frames. Even though it is known that focusing on a certain theory carries the risk of neglecting a critical approach to the theory that one is working with. So, inspired by interdisciplinary fields of study, this project will liberally move beyond disciplinary boundaries. Inspired by postmodern studies, a priority will be given to insider voices and the opinions of my informants, including secondary literature of local origin (by 'local origin' is meant material not only in Azerbaijani but also Russian).<sup>18</sup>

### 1.3 Organisation of the thesis

To undertake several things at once leads to challenges of presentation. The absence of a study of the genre has in addition directly affected my choices and techniques of presentation. Therefore I have decided to divide my descriptions into three parts. Firstly, methodological challenges will be discussed. Secondly, the thesis will focus on analysis of the autonomous text field with the autonomic relationship to its surroundings, audience, and performance. Thirdly, I will try to analyse the impact of external references i.e. as how the historical picture of meykhana affects the genre today. The thesis is organized thematically (genre, performance, language) and by conceptual principles (introduction, analysis, interpretations). The traditional outline, from the general to the specific, is followed throughout the thesis.

It is beyond the scope of this study to give a thorough account of the development of meykhana in a variety of scenes that eventually spread across Azerbaijan after the

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<sup>18</sup> During the Soviet era, especially after Khrushchev's reforms, russification was further strengthened and Russian language dominated in public spheres including the academic one. Reform made it possible to opt out of one's mother tongue or take it as an elective subject, much to the benefit of the Russian language in schools.

dissolution of the Soviet Union. As a first attempt, at tackling the genre, my primary technical approach from the beginning has been to focus on creating a basis for further investigations, which among other things means I must be as perspicuous as possible. This thesis does not concern itself with the time period studied, nor does it include any micro-history. The study draws upon both contemporaneous and retrospective accounts, including personal unpublished stanzas, interviews, jokes, musical recordings as well as official publications, documents, newspaper articles, motion pictures, films and videos. How post-Soviet social conditions affected the retrospective narratives is not easily grasped by me and is not of great concern here.

Chapter two develops the methodological framework for this study. The chapter reflects around definition of the field and dichotomy of poetry (written) and lyrics (sung). Being ethnically local but a Western scholar and at the same time a female scholar investigating the collective thoughts of a male environment carries deviant methodological challenges. This together with my positioning in the choice of methodological tools applied will follow throughout all thesis.

Chapter three will discuss polysemy of meykhana, since during the investigation I witnessed manifold meanings and interpretations of the term. Understanding historical processes as they are connected to the genre is not simple. So, this chapter will also highlight some of the cultural history of Azerbaijan and the meykhana genre. Account of meykhana in other contexts is also included here.

Chapter four is concerned with making general theoretical generalisation of the genre's texts' immanent qualities, their poetic form and some compositional qualities. More adequate for that purpose, in the first part of the chapter, only meykhana found in written sources is examined. The reason for that is both purely technical and future-oriented. First of all, such a choice makes it easier to make statements and minimize misunderstandings and misinterpretations when dealing with oral lyrics and texts. Secondly it contributes to establish an overview of the source material, setting out a system for further reading. The second part of the chapter concerns its rhythm, firstly through audio, interviews and YouTube videos. Meykhana's rhythms are akin to the metric form of eastern poetry and have drawn me away from an audio-centric approach and more into the theory of eastern literature.

Compositional properties of *meykhanas* are heterogeneous; they are both topical,

concerning concrete and locally known events as much as traditional folk songs, or psychological or social states. At the same time they can be abstract, detached from any reference to a specific instance and depending solely on rhetoric and insider processes, also being this way linguistically, e.g. *meykhana*'s language most of the time refers to itself rather than to its content. Battles and their dynamics will be discussed. Here it is worth mentioning that the battle character of *meykhana* also goes beyond a single event. Sometimes performers create new meykhanas with the same subject created already by some other performer as a response to his story. *Meykhana* titles including the words *avtoş*<sup>19</sup> and concerning the subject of cars is a popular modern theme for different performers. Something quite common is subjective truths told within objective realities. I suppose all poetry is. These will be subjects for the chapter five.

Chapter six will discuss meykhana's visual and compositional similarities with other local genres, which I think can contribute with better understanding of the genre in general.

The third part of the thesis, starting with chapter seven, will give serious attention to fieldwork-grounded observations about language communities. Chapter seven will start with descriptions of setting and performance. Two spatial constructs are worth noting: *Meykhana medjlises* (gatherings and weddings) and so-called *show meykhanas*, organized for radio shows and TV competitions, usually in recording studios. I will shortly discuss the settings of performances in *medjlises*, which is characterised by use of drugs and alcohol by men. By analysing its narrative perspectives and its genre constituency, the levels where and how the stanzas are created and spatialized is examined here. To describe the birth of a *meykhana* created in a gathering, here I attach the story of Balasadiq, a meykhana poet who will describe one *meykhana medjlis* on the shore of the Caspian Sea.<sup>20</sup>

The language of meykhana is a subject for chapter eight. I will assign observations from one case study to this part of the thesis. Two case studies have been conducted: one focusing on language, the second on content. By case studies I mean, in addition to more general interviews with the performers, separate interviews were conducted

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<sup>19</sup> Avtoş: from the Russian word *автомобиль* (*avtomobil*) meaning car. The suffix *ş* is a diminutive suffix corresponding to the German *-chen*.

<sup>20</sup> Balasadiq 1993: 7-12

specifically about particular poems composed by the informants, which I had transcribed and had in front of me in the interviews, and we went from verse to verse with the authors; I asked questions about the verses and the authors had a chance to talk about and around the lyrics. Key themes in the case studies were the content and form of the text, phrases, negative words, positive words, and nuances of expression. It also includes a quantitative approach, counting words, Russian words, modern Turkish words that entered the language after the fall of the Soviet Union, new words, and themes. I examine the question of whether the genre is dominated by words related to the country, the ethnic group that the poet comes from, or the nation. What kind of specific terms or slang can be generalized as being characteristic of *meykhana*? Other characteristic features would be manifest in sentences, arguments, intentions and attitudes. Focus on content and language in case studies have created a contextual bridge from the form and the structure of the analysed lyrics to the more pragmatic spheres of self-expression, acceptance and individuality generally.

General review of literature gathered during a fieldtrip and its content will be discussed in chapter nine. Here the content of the first pioneering works of the *meykhana* literature belonging to 1919-1930 era and two books published shortly after the fall of Soviet will be discussed.

Chapter ten will deal with modern conditions in the new country of Azerbaijan. Using meykhana performer Məşədi Baba (and one of his verses) as an empirical example, I will describe the creative thinking, coloured by the revival of religion in suburban Baku, which has allowed the meykhana to flourish among the men there. My observations from visits to Baku villages will also be given here.

Approaching the end some theoretical and terminological weaknesses will be illuminated. The thesis will be concluded by showing the sources that have been left out and a brief description of the modern meykhana genre.



## 2. Methodology

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For me, growing up in closed Soviet Azerbaijan and today being a part of the Western scholarly tradition, it has been a challenge to establish the boundaries for what should be included into analysis and what should be excluded. However, the process of constantly changing the background in order to highlight important aspects has been paid attention to throughout the thesis. Translation and interpretation of texts, individual messages, poetry and lyrics from a local to a global context presents constant challenges. Here my choices have been made with several objectives in mind. First and foremost, as mentioned, what poems and stories should I include from all that could conceivably be included. Another challenge has been that many important references are only understandable to those who know Baku very well and Azerbaijani language very well, and are familiar with the Baku dialect and its potential for the playful mutation of words in *meykhana*. In order to illuminate the nuances of expression, my choice has been to spend more time on some specific expressions and terms, and show the reader different translations and interpretations of those. A third challenge has been my position in the project, insofar as I am known to my informants as a Western scholar (but Azerbaijani) collecting material I think is important to this project. Also, since the practice of the genre was prohibited in the Soviet era and naturally not studied, almost all of the secondary literature has been written in Azerbaijani within a new Azerbaijani academic tradition, the new books produced after the *Azərbaycan dilində Latin Qrafikası ilə kütləvi nəşrlərin keçirilməsi haqqında Azərbaycan respublikası prezidentinin sərəncamı* (*The order of Azerbaijani president on mass publication in Azerbaijan language in Latin alphabet* (January 12th 2004)), which in the main glorify nationalist assumptions that have been dominating the discourse. This has set limitations to my relationship to any research that has been conducted. This means that one is forced to be critical towards all kinds of interpretation methods that have emerged during recent times. It has also been time-consuming to try to find any academic critique to the tentative research that has been made. I have however focused on taking the pioneering responsibility of reviewing existing local sources that have been connected to the genre, and investigated them on their validity, for which the scope of this paper does not fully allow. However, the most obvious invalidities and revisionist approaches will be criticized.

Meykhanas are always improvised and were prohibited for a long time. Both of these facts militate against providing a chronological outlook. Improvisation and performance are by definition ephemeral and lot of them are vanished, by being not recorded, registered or transcribed. Also, the ephemeral aspect of it might involve a researcher's subjectivity in different ways than fixed texts would. In addition, prohibition caused an absence of academic, intellectual and articulate analysis or description of the genre. Therefore, in order to grasp the complexity of the subject, during my fieldwork I was eager to collect as many meykhanas as possible. All through the period of investigation and during the writing process I have tried to follow hermeneutic footsteps, by analysing the lyrics in the context of its time of creation and tried to make possible movements across disciplinary boundaries in such a way that I could be able to show that language and meykhana's content changes according to the moment in history. In this thesis the meykhana verses I use therefore are from different time periods. This will be stated each time. I will also use some verses possessed during interviews. The date in those cases will be noted as the day of the recording. Informants usually have given approximate times for the improvisation of verses. Moreover, a wide array of accounts of meykhana in written sources including articles, lexical sources, and interviews has been used. That includes lexical sources concerning the genre, and newspaper and magazine articles about the genre. The fanzine *Meyxana Gazeti*, which existed for twenty issues in 2009, is also included in the references. Stories and lyrics from nine books will also be referred to. Seven of these books belong to pre- and early Soviet literature when the country used the Arabic alphabet, from 1919 to 1930 (providing 51 meykhanas). In addition, in 1993 in the wake of the Soviet Union's dissolution, two books were published (providing 271 meykhanas and 11 stories), at a time when the country started to adopt the Latin alphabet, although both these books, which are compilation of poetries belonging to different authors spanning over the period between 1919-1989, are in the Cyrillic alphabet. One of those books, *Oturmuşam samovardan yuxarı (I Am Sitting Above the Samovar)*, includes also personal stories from Balasadiq, a well-known meykhana performer.

Most of the stanzas I have acquired are through written sources of meykhana. Some of those will be presented in the scope of the thesis, in connection with the poetic form and structure of the genre. However it should be mentioned that the canonization

of poetry in Western academia has served to construct a binary opposition of written poetry against performed lyrics (Eckstein 2010: 10-11). Meykhana is improvised and luckily communication of stanzas via interviews has been great in providing performed lyrics. I will characterize the written meykhanas found in books as poetry *with its own internalized voice encoded in the medium of writing* as Lars Eckstein (2010) defines it, a markedly different thing from lyrics, since lyrics have their own language connected with performance, where its voice is *a priori* external.

‘Interpretation of lyrics thus involves much more than their verbal content – it involves literability as well as the modality of language, it involves questions of style and musical context, of social embeddedness and cultural value, and it demands an understanding of reciprocal relationship between (embodied) verbal input and performance ideology’ (Eckstein 2010: 38).

Lyrics in the scope of this thesis is defined as my transcription of stanzas either provided by my informants or transcribed from the performances of which I have watched videos. What I mean is, if stanzas have been collected by me through an audio source (if I heard a sound, either voice of person, or in a video or audio recording), this will be defined as lyrics. If stanzas were encountered initially from a book or an article, this will be referred to as poetry. It is necessary to acknowledge the place where the utterance and reception of a meykhana takes place in order to understand its stanzas better: a book, a wedding, a street corner, a celebration, a television programme, or on YouTube. The distinction between meykhanas coming from written sources, and meykhanas which I transcribed myself, will create the grounds for the application of different theoretical approaches in the thesis. While Meykhana’s poetry has been approached under the theoretical light of eastern poetic tradition, those written meykhanas have also given me a reason to categorise different forms of meykhanas (cf. chapter 4) while witnessing the setting and around performances provided by videos. The lyrics have created a surface where I could analyse the modern kinds of music, modern language and jargon, and modern themes and motifs of the meykhanas. The abovementioned systematisation in addition has contributed towards creating an expedient environment for further investigation. As poetry/lyrics reflects the difference between written and oral expression, my approach to the phenomenon has been as to a transgressing genre, located at an intersection of ephemeral performances in weddings or *medjlises* and compiled books of writing.

Generally, a written meykhana does not have any name. It can be referred to as *gəzəl*, *şer*, *yazılı meyxana*, *deyişmə* even *qəfiyə* (ghazel, poetry, written meykhana, battle and rhyme, respectively). The term lyrics (*mahnı sözü*) is not in use. To determine verses of written origin however has been sometimes a tedious process, since the rhythm is not easy to discern from ink. The content usually reveals the genre by being ludic, opposing and aphoristic.

Despite the fact that other oral lyrical genres such as lullabies, *bayatis*<sup>21</sup> and folk and *ashiq* songs have been a subject for scholars, the study of *meykhana* has been downgraded after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. At the same time poetry analysed by me almost a century after its improvisation within its own conventional ritualistic frames, including the performance and setting around it, offers constantly a critical approach to established academic fields. Thus my research started with a semantic research on terminology, which among other things illuminated for me the obvious resemblance of meykhana poetry with eastern ghazels, although the themes of ghazels are women, love, wine and beauty (Cengiz 1983: 46). At some point, I was searching for ghazels mentioning the word *meykhana* in order to understand the capacities of the term. All this was done to seek better understanding of the genre's lyrics. Mapping semantic capacities of terms including empiric interpretations exists throughout the thesis. In chapter three I give a short account of the value-charged and idiosyncratic term *meykhana*. Secondly, there is a short account of the term *bedihe* (also *bedie*, *bedye*, *bediye*) which will be explained both within lexical and empirical semantics. I also expose briefly the term *harabat* (ruins) to the same exercise. Terms and definitions will also carry a personal connotation in addition to their lexical meanings. This thesis will deal with empiric semantics for interpretation and clarification. Through exploration of different interpretations of words and expressions, one is reminded of subjectivities, different opinions and mobilities.

The arenas of my fieldwork have been libraries, three institutes, two universities, homes of my informants, Buzovna culture centre and Baku villages. I have also watched national television competitions, other relevant television programmes and a number of videos via Internet forums.

Unintentionally my assignment of the *canonized phenomenology* to the genre emerges

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<sup>21</sup> cf. footnote 12

into powerlessness, which I ascribe to the genre and its participants. This is easily visible to me. When I organized my material and when the serious writing process started I assigned another role to the genre and its participants, as Clifford points out. The power and history works through me, an outsider researcher ‘in a way authors cannot fully control’ (Clifford 1986: 7). Here, I was supposed to sit in a library, reading room, home or café and write about my informant’s truth, their lives and artistic achievement, without being fully able to consult them about my interpretations. On some occasions I contacted the informants for that purpose, nevertheless this was not feasible every time I felt I was making an assumption.

I have also not made any aesthetic judgement of the lyrics chosen.

## 2.1 Defining the field

When the Soviet Union fell I was 13 years old and living in Azerbaijan. Meykhana was not unknown to me, as neighbourhood boys in the building I was growing up in sometimes mentioned it in conversations. With a general approach to the study of the cultural and sociological phenomenon, I have tried to combine the kind of pre-understanding embedded in my childhood memories with my professional research career which is mostly localized in an increasingly interconnected world of music scene through media and the internet, in addition to the main fieldwork-grounded observations that were conducted strictly locally in Baku city and its villages. By looking at the genre as part of social and political history, the stanzas painted a picture of new Baku and Bakuvian subcultural mobilization that I had not hitherto been familiar with. So, in discussing the field of my research, the data and observations have come in these very different ways. This fieldwork-grounded-in-locality, if it is possible to call it that, carries challenges, which the disciplines have not dissolved yet. Research on a musical poetic community where the music concerned, the lyrics, and their performance are taken into account while at the same time describing the social context represents an interdisciplinary mosaic is not a simple mission to analyse. Each discipline has its own standards and none of them is able to fully adopt new philological objectives. Without going deep into the theories, it should be pointed out that lyrics have rarely been assigned as the central object of a study, since they fall

between disciplinary stools as a ‘theoretical indiscipline’<sup>22</sup> (Eckstein 2010: 11). As it was for Eckstein, the best way for me in order to give an account of such a study nexus has been to move liberally between such disciplines as methodology, literature, linguistics, musicology and ethnography, avoiding their boundaries and theoretical embodiment. Concerning the analysis of popular music, this paragraph stresses the contextual aspects of the methodology of music analysed. Audio-visual media is to become a privileged educational necessity, as Philip Tagg today works to develop new methodologies to grasp the complexity of the study of pop music. The point is it is simply not possible to be solely dependent on numeracy and verbal literacy to posit hypotheses, which carry solid academic weight in popular music (Tagg 2002). My understanding of meykhana would not be the same without watching YouTube and dozens of private meykhana clips uploaded in different sites. The videos play the most essential role on how meykhanas are conceived by its supporters and listeners. People, either performers or listeners, do not look for news, books, or transcriptions of improvised stanzas or performances, but rather find the closest Internet café where they can watch the previous night’s event already uploaded on web sites. To avoid videos in the study of the meykhana genre would be not only reductionist but also could be defined as having weak validity. The genre has become available nationally through television competitions as *De Gelsin (Say and Let it Come)* and *Sozum Var (I Have Something to Say)*. What is discussed in online forums is also usually connected to these talk shows and its participants.

It must be mentioned that it is more challenging to write about contemporary literature and art than historical (Eco 2003: 48) because it is difficult to obtain secondary literature, which challenges one to create new analytical methods. One risks copying what others have done and it is easy to repeat what other critics have said before. For historical writers there are already established interpretation methods, while the opinions on modern authors are more abstract. My critical ability can be characterized by the lack of perspective because so little time has passed. But that does not mean that that lack of perspective is something negative. This challenge forces a researcher to be critical of all kinds of interpretation methods that exist for the study of literary works from other post regions and also within the context of the Soviet Union.

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted Attali J. 1985: 5

## 2.2 Informants

My primary sources in the analysis of the contemporary<sup>23</sup> meykhana scene are: in-depth interviews with six informants (a total approximately of 15 hours) (including interviews conducted between the 6<sup>th</sup> of October and the 8<sup>th</sup> of November, 2010, the material from the test field project I performed for the course KOS 4002 in 2009), my field diaries, observations notes, conversations and observations. I draw on my experiences from a previous visit to Baku in 2009 when I spent two weeks there and also met philologists at Baku State University.

The main analysis in the second part of the thesis is based on my interviews and verses provided by my informants (that is because the description and argumentation potential is higher), while the written meykhanas happen to play a greater role in establishing a theoretical framework of the genre, which the first part of the thesis will deal with.

Although my experiences from my meetings and conversations with many people about meykhana are relevant, and will be applied during this thesis, I will use six people as my main informants. These are two experts, one journalist and three performers. The names of informants have been changed, except for Dr. Nizami Tağısoy. Titles (including religious titles) are kept.

### 2.2.1 Main informants

#### Scholars

In the first week of the fieldwork I was introduced to Nizami Tağısoy, folklorist in Baku Slavic University, who was surprised and at the same relieved to find another scholar who was interested in researching *meykhana*. He explained to me that he has

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By contemporary meykhana I mean the period starting from 2002. Even though there was a period before that when meykhana was no longer prohibited, and there were some unsystematic attempts to break through on the national stage, and different public meykhana medjlises began to take place, it did not start to seriously bloom until there were competitions broadcast on radio channels such as Space, 101 Anten FM and TV channels such as ANS, ATV, and Space TV.

encountered manifold complex criticism – academic, professional and private – of the notion of studying meyxhana. He was made to feel that such an undertaking would not be taken seriously, and his efforts to obtain financial or even moral support for such work had been rejected. Thus de-motivated, he was forced to postpone any such study or interest. In the one of the first meetings I was asked if I would like to join him in the book project he was planning, a historical theoretical book in Azerbaijani about the genre meyxhana on linguistic and folkloristic grounds, which will be used locally within the university and high school system. With the involvement of a Western scholar in the project he would hope to get financial support and gain serious academic attention. I was undoubtedly interested and I wished to contribute with my analyses, findings and assistance. To this valuable engagement I spent time during two previous semesters.

(During my fieldtrip I had three interviews with him, approximately 1 hour 37 minutes, 1 hour and 30 minutes, in addition to e-mails and phone calls).

Hacı<sup>24</sup> Qəzəlxan, the second expert, is a well-known contemporary ghazel poet who has been involved in meyxhana scene through national TV and radio programs. I wrote to his address, which I found in his personal web-log. He answered some days later and we made an appointment to meet at Buzovna Mədəniyyət evi, in Buzovna village. (Interviews approximately 2 hours and 1 hour, plus telephone conversations and emails).

### Performers

Rafiq. He is unknown in any mediated meyxhana scene and considers meyxhana to be only a hobby. The only meyxhana I have by him, which I also later analysed together with him, is *Gülle Rəhim* (Bullet Rehim)<sup>25</sup>. Signed as being by anonymous, without any information about where it was performed and recorded, I found it on the bulletin board at the Faculty of Literature (Ədəbiyyat fakultəsi) at Baku State University. A professor I was visiting that day gave me the contact information for Rafiq. (The conversations about *Gülle Rəhim* were 1 hour, and 24 minutes. The text of the poem and the case study with the author are reproduced in the appendix).

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<sup>24</sup> Hacı- Azerbaijani for Hajji-(derived from the word Hajj-pilgrimage to Mekka) The person who performs the Hajj is called a hajji (Naroditskaya 2002: 227n) in English.

<sup>25</sup> Subject of the conversation here is about Rəhim Qaziyev Minister of Defence in Azerbaijan in the period 1992–1993



Hacı Əli. A well-known performer, he is a public face and a jury member in the nationally broadcasted television show *De Gəlsin*.<sup>26</sup> Rafiq helped me to get in touch with Hacı Əli. They are both from Mashtaga village and share common friends. (Interviews 2 hours 30 minutes).

Rəşad. I interviewed him about the meykhana *Ashiq Çalır Sazı Pulun Xətrinə*. I found information about him on the online forum [www.meyxana.net](http://www.meyxana.net) and conducted an interview with him during field course KOS 4002. (Interview approximately 4 hours 40 minutes, comprising 4 interviews, which I am also using here mainly in paragraphs concerning lexical and linguistic peculiarities).

Fərid. A Journalist. He has an extensive knowledge of the contemporary meykhana scene and personally knows many performers. It was Hacı Əli who recommended him to me and gave me his contact information. (Interviews 20 minutes and 50 minutes plus email and telephone contact).

### 2.2.2 Others

An informant who helped me was a professor I met at the State University when I visited Azerbaijan in 2009 and this person helped me to get in touch with the expert Tağısoy. There was also a journalist and member of the Sufi religion I had mail contact with, İrade (a girl interested in meykhana) and other youngsters I have talked to (friends of my cousin living in Baku), as well as employees of the folklore institute.

It also should be mentioned that almost all my informants tried to contribute with what they could, in order to be able to provide safety for me, through logistical help or to assist me with finding contacts or generally find my way around, and they offered also to participate with me in events, if possible. Unfortunately my wish to participate in meykhana medjlises was very clearly denied. When conversations about the participation of women in meykhana came up, it was told that women are not invited. Meykhana discourse is peppered with strongly stereotypical gender roles, which I find myself in the middle of. However discussing and highlighting women's positioning in *meykhana* did not provide with much concrete answers, as the conversation was seen

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<sup>26</sup>

Which year he was a jury member is left out, for privacy reasons.

to be not even important to spend our time on.

### 3 Historical background

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Azerbaijan, a land with its connection to ancient times, is a small country with eight million inhabitants, situated between three much bigger and more powerful countries, Russia, Iran and Turkey, which have different languages and alphabets. Since the country has a history of occupation and alliances with all three countries, three different alphabets have been applied. Each of these options to change the written language represents an act relating to alliances with and distances between nations, sometimes voluntarily and sometimes by force, and none of these changes has happened without an impact on Azerbaijani identity. In the Soviet Union, of the Caucasian republics, Georgia and Armenia had the privilege of keeping their alphabets (the reason is unknown to me), while Azerbaijan had to go over to Cyrillic script in 1938. The country has had four alphabets in the last 100 years. Arabic was the alphabet until 1924, which was replaced by Latin in 1924, followed by Stalin's imposition of Cyrillic in 1938, which remained until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. These alphabets have also come in a number of varieties with various modifications and changes: if one counts modifications and corrections that have been made in some letters in both Latin and Cyrillic during this century, there have been at least 10 occasions when the alphabet has been changed.<sup>27</sup> This has made a big impact on the national collective feeling in Azerbaijan. The result we find today is that throughout the country newspapers, street signs, shops, television channels and kiosks display Cyrillic and Latin script interchangeably. The vacillating Azerbaijani cultural position considering the history in this respect has undoubtedly left traces on artistic and cultural developments. Azerbaijan's history relates to the history of Arabic, Persian, Ottoman and Russian empires. The Arab, Turkic, Persian and then Russian and Armenian migrants in the beginning of the century, have left marks on the country's culture and literature. The country is known for its pre-Turkic (mainly Persian), Turkic and Soviet poets, all equally acknowledged. From another perspective, musical traditions from different cultural conglomerates are also tied to Azerbaijani culture. One is *mugam*, associated with Arabic and Persian roots. The other is the music of Azerbaijani *ashiqs*, parallel to Turkish *ashiqs*. These two musical

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<sup>27</sup> Bahadori: Əlphaḡet in the boiling pot of politics, Azerbaijan International, September 1993 (1.3), Pages 10-13

traditions have been associated with different geographical localities. *Mugam* areas have been Karabakh, Shirvan and the Absheron peninsula while *ashiq* was associated with the areas of Gazakh, Nakhichevan and Karabakh (Naroditskaya 2006: 10-12). *Meykhana* practised in the Baku region, however, is not mentioned in Naroditskaya's book.

The first national acknowledgement of *meykhana* followed the first national *meykhana* competitions in 1992. The Doctor of Philosophy in Fine Art Qorxmaz Əlicanzadə (also Qorxmaz Əlili), together with the winners of the *Respublika Meyxanaçılar Müsabiqəsi* (Republic competition of *Meykhana* performers) organized a *meykhana* concert, correctly referred to as the national *meykhana medjlis*, in which the only instruments that were used were the local percussion instruments *Nağara* and *Goşa Nağara*. Tağısoy argues that this event was the turning point after which *meykhana* arrived on the national stage and became that which we witness today. Rəhimova argues that during last 100 years *meykhana* has experienced three periods: before the Soviet Union, during and after. These changes occurred simultaneously with the complex, conflicted eras of the history of the nation. Between 1920 and 1930 there was given great room for the utterance of *meykhanas*. Here it positioned itself generally in the belles-lettres, and theatrical works witnessed in the repertoires of the *Təbliq-tənqid* and *Satiragit* theatre. During World War 2 its popularity continued even though it became prohibited, where we witness Əliağa Vahid's *meykhanas* against fascism and support for soldiers in the war. The third period as argued by Rəhimova is the period after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Rəhimova 2002: 5). Informants have many memories of the *meykhanas* of the Soviet era where a great deal of melancholy is attached, as they think that it was better than today, or that normative thinking was better under the Soviet rule than it is today, and also that expectations towards the qualities of art were higher than it is today, and so on. Most of the stanzas they remember are from the period between the 1950s and 1980s. Some mentioned stanzas about cars, wars and marijuana. They remember stories told to them about other performers attending the battlegrounds in the front line of wars, to support the soldiers. My informers like to tell stories of when they have felt proud. These, however are usually the stories of their youth, in the three last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Three performers I have happened to interview were not positive or proud of the direction the development of the genre has taken in the last 10 years. My attempts,

however, to interview relatively younger performers who entered a professional scene through the nationally organized channels were not successful and I had to return from Azerbaijan without this contact. In my defence it should be said that these performers are popular and have busy professional schedules, and that contact information provided through Internet pages were worthless.

### 3.1. Introducing the term *meykhana*

The absence of written accounts<sup>28</sup> of meykhana in former times leaves little room for flexible analytical perspectives. Therefore, concerning the genre's intertextuality, the study of allusion, and archetypes, one can contribute with historical literary parallels in which one can posit hypotheses of the genre. There is a need to define the genre systematically. Testing different theories is needed. The role of Islamic symbols in this context undoubtedly needs illumination.

The accounts of meykhana are usually unsystematic and often repeated. Below, in explaining the term's religious and polysemic meanings, I wish to gather together different lexical meanings of the term. In the initial phase of the project, when I was also interested in giving an account of the origin of the term, I found myself searching for the capacity of the term by looking for it in different stanzas both in classical literature and folklore. Here my purpose was to illuminate meykhana as a term belonging to different semiotics, including Koranic references, a 'true word', or an event in which a true word is said, intoxication through love (love to understanding, love to God) or a venue, a place for wishes and praying, within religious symbolism. Some of these will be explained below. However, misinterpretations have occurred because investigators have been trying to connect the genre meykhana to the origin of the term meykhana. This will also be explained a little further down. Hacıbəyov (2005: 379) has also used the term *meykhana* as a musicological term; he described a normal voice pitch as *meykhana*.

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<sup>28</sup> By the absence of written accounts it is meant that the genre's prohibition resulted in the genre's name never appearing in Soviet literature.

### 3.1.1 *Meykhana* as an Islamic symbol

*'We are a people of ruins, we have come out of meykhanas'* (Ə. Vahid.) – Hacı Qəzəlxan (28.10.11)

*Biz xərabat əhliyə, meyxanalardan çıxmışıq.* (Ə. Vahid.) – Hacı Qəzəlxan (28.10.11)

In the mystical literature there are terms *meyhanə*, *xərabat* and *viranə* with different capacities. This strophe of Əliağa Vahid (1895-1965), considered as the first *meykhana* poet who accomplished national status, saying 'We are a people of ruins, we have come out of meykhanas' made a great impression on me. The line is read to me by Hacı Qəzəlxan while talking of genre's historic development where informant argues for meykhana's connection to Islam. A word meykhana in the meaning of pub or wine house does not exist in the Azerbaijani language today, but the original meaning of meykhana is however a wine house or tavern. Vahid does not imply here that we are alcoholics, nor that we are meykhana supporters (as a genre). Like in Buddhism and Gnosticism, in Sufism, too, fundamental understanding starts with the acknowledgement that life is full of suffering. In Sufism (also *tassavuf*) the terms *xərabat* (ruins) means when a person can free him/herself from things and material realism happening on the surface and destroy the spurious, sensual reality (*xərab etmək* in Azerbaijani means *to destroy*). As explained by my informant, it means 'to eclipse temporary appetite and becoming unified with eternity'. Ruins has also another metaphoric meaning, such as tavern and meykhana. Wine was not allowed in a Muslim city, and therefore the wine maker was the *magian*, fire worshipper, a Zoroastrian or Christian monk, who sold his wine in the suburbs, in the 'ruins' (Andrews & Black & Kalpakli 1997:177).

While dealing with the Sufi references here, I wish to explain the role of this religious orientation in the Turkic language area. Sufism generally broke down the barriers between the privileged and the underprivileged and diffused literacy, including oral literacy. Another contribution it made was that the rituals, metaphors and artistic customs connected to religion gained a stronger ground and the grip of traditional religious authorities weakened in society. Andrews states that 'Sufism [...] did for Islam some of the same things that the Reformation did for Christianity', and

mentions that by the end of fifteenth century the mystical orders had become an important and powerful social and political strength as well as a religious force. In addition, although the Arabic language was maintained as a language of ritual, theology and law, in the mid-fifteenth century, it seemed that almost everyone in Ottoman lands was a mystic of one sort or another. Sufism did not divide between Sunni and Shiite (Andrews & Kalpakli 2005: 334-335) (however it favoured the Shia since it entered Azerbaijan through the carriers of Shia, by the Safavid dynasty).

### 3.1.2 Meykhana as a musicological term

From a musicological point of view, Nəcəfzadə (2010: 66) uses an interesting quote from the Azerbaijani composer Uzeyir Hacıbəyov.<sup>29</sup>

‘The advantage of singing *dastgah*<sup>30</sup> for the performer is that he/she needs not to follow the particular pattern of songs and templates but opens the wide arena for his/hers own creativity. And his voice is used in different textures as bass, high-toned and meykhana.’<sup>31</sup>

Meykhana is in fact not said in a high or low pitch. Uzeyir Hacıbəyov uses the term *meykhana* for the texture of the sound on a middle or normal pitch, which is needed to clearly pronounce the words. Here is arisen a new and unknown meaning of the notion of ‘meykhana’, as a nature of a voice. Could the meykhana genre take its name from a musicological term in the same way as popular electronic musical genres as the bass music, dub music has taken their names from pitches of the voice?

### 3.1.3 Meykhana as a venue

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<sup>29</sup> Uzeyir Hacıbəyov in newer sources has been referred to as Uzeyir Hacıbəyli. Here artificially replacing the Russian legacy of -ova/-ov, and -eva/-ev with Azerbaijani li/lı in a surname extension after the composer's death does not sound anything else than ‘post-colonial amnesia’ (Gandhi, 1998: 4), i.e. the urge of historical self-invention.

<sup>30</sup> *Dəstgah* is a Persian word: dəst ‘sum, total’, gah ‘direction, idea, zone, moment’. The term is applied to the singing part of the *mugam* genre.

<sup>31</sup> *Xanəndə üçün dəstgah oxumağın yaxşılığı ondadır ki, müəyyən bir hava və bəhr geydində olmayıb, öz fantaziyasına geniş bir meydan açır. Və səsini bəm, zil. meyxane kimi müxtəlif tesselaturalarda işlədir* (Hacıbəyov 2005: 379)

Below Nizami Tağısoy has contributed with these observations, which are relevant for the purpose of this chapter. For the Azerbaijani minority in the Georgian Garaçöp district (which hosts seven villages: Ləmbəli, Tüllər, Keşəli, Əyram, Gazlar, Baldoy, Muğanlı), *meykhana* has entirely different semantic functions practiced by that group. Students of the Folklore Research Institute (in Azerbaijani: Folklor Araşdırmaları İnstitutu) at Baku Slavyan University each year are sent on folklore excursions (in Azerbaijani: folklor təcrübəsi) to different Turkic regions. While on a folklore excursion in Garaçöp, Sultan Məlikova, at that time a second year a student of that institute, discovered interesting facts about *meykhana* and its gatherings. I wish to introduce this ethnographic account with the words of the 80-year-old village inhabitant Əsgər Məhəmməd Oğlu.<sup>32</sup>

‘Meykhana is an important part of Garaçöp ceremonies. Garaçöp residents say a *pray* when they make a wish for something. If the wish comes true they organize gatherings of meykhana. It is similar to some kind of ceremony where oblations are given and shared. In Garaçöp meykhana is the poetry of the religious gathering<sup>33</sup>... The main participants of meykhana are women. It can remind one of Sufi medjlises. Women dancing in *Meykhana*, put money into the tambourine – the instrument of the leader. Men are also participants of *Meykhana*, the leaders can be both men and women. The most popular leader of meykhana in Garaçöp is Islam. There is another gathering similar to meykhana in Garaçöp. It is called *Mövlud*. *Mövlud* is a praising of the Prophet. But here the main participants are men. Also in *Mövlud* like in *Meykhana*, people make certain wishes. When the wishes come true, the meykhana gatherings are organized. Usually *Meykhanas* and *Mövluds* are organized on the same day. That way the people who made a wish, organize *Meykhana* and *Mövluds* and make others delighted’<sup>34</sup> (Tagisoy & Zakariyya 2011: 31).

Same type of ritual is also mentioned in *Borçalı dastanı* (Epos of Borchali) by Akif

<sup>32</sup> The original notes of Sultan Məlikova are preserved in Baku Slavic University, Folklore Research Institute, Scientific Research Laboratory.

<sup>33</sup> Here in original language the word used for religious venue is *pir*. Pirs are non-registered institutions, places of continuous pilgrimage, (Naroditskaya 2002: 227n).

<sup>34</sup> «*Meyxana*» Garaçöp mərasimlərində mühüm yer tutur. Garaçöplülər hər hansı bir arzunun, istəyin həyata keçməsi ilə bağlı deyim deyir, dilək diləyir. Bu baş tutduqda meyxana məclisləri qurulur. Bu bir növ nəzir vermək, paylamaq mərasiminə bənzəyir. Garaçöpdə meyxana pirin gəzəlidir... Meyxana iştirakçıları əsasən qadınlar olur. Bu bir növ sufi məclislərini xatırladır. Meyxanada oynayan qadınlar müridin (ifaçının) gavalı oxşar tərəkəsinə nəzir atırlar. Lakin bununla yanaşı meyxanada kişilər də iştirak edirlər. Meyxana müridləri həm qadın, həm də kişi ola bilər. Garaçöpdə ən məşhur ifaçı mürid İslamdır. Garaçöpdə meyxanaya bənzər bir mərasim də keçirilir. Ona «*Mövlud*» deyilir. «*Mövlud*» peyğəmbərin tərifidir. Burada isə əsasən kişilər olur. Mövluddə də meyxanada olduğu kimi insanlar hər hansı niyyət tuturlar. Niyyət gərəkləşdikdə məclislər təşkil olunur. Əksər hallarda meyxana və mövlüdlər eyni gündə keçirilir. Beləlikdə, niyyət edənlər meyxana, ya mövlud keçirib insanları feyziyyəb edirlər.



Xansultanlı (2006). In *Borçalı dastanı* the folklore memories of the Borçalı region of Georgia have been collected. The author of the prologue, Qasımlı Məhərrəm, states that real personalities, geographical names, and the special attributes of local ceremonies and holidays are described here (Xansultanlı 2006: 5). After giving some poetic samples, the author gives the explanation of the term *meykhana* in a footnote: ‘*Meyxana – Borçalıda keçirilən sufi dərviş məclisinin elarası adı*’ (‘Meykhana is a popular/common name of the Sufi dervish ceremonies in Borçalı’) (Xansultanli 2006: 49). The following poetic sample from the *Borçalı dastanı*, which may be a bit difficult to understand, mentions an ecstatic feeling occurring in the venue of *meykhana* is as follows:

*By taking a handful of flowers, washing in the spring  
my grandmother takes an ablution, and fills the samovar with water  
the tea of Adna is cooking, Crazy Mustafa should hear that  
and come here from beyond, and should suddenly appear  
and haven taken bath in the cooking water, would wheedle anyone*

*Bir ovuc gül götürüb, bulagda yuya-yuya,  
nənəm gusul eyləyir, samvarı çəkib suya,  
Adna çayı gaynayir, Dəli Mustafa duya,  
O yandan bəri aşıb, gələ çıxı gəfildən,  
Gaynar suda yuyulub, adamı tuta dildən*<sup>35</sup>

Here he gives information about Crazy Mustafa (*Dəli Mustafa*), whose real name is Mustafa Nəbi Oğlu Əlləzov (1913-1992) and says:

‘Crazy Mustafa is remembered as a last Sufi dervish belonging to Naqshbandi sect. When he accomplished a spiritually ecstatic moment he used to perform ablution in the cooking water of the samovar, and sometimes extinguish burning coal with his tongue.’<sup>36</sup>

Traces of trance and ecstatic feeling occurring in the genre of *meykhana* will be accounted for later in the thesis. As seen above, the genre has been nourished by the dissemination of Islam and the formation of dervish rituals. However that fact is not

<sup>35</sup> Xansultanlı 2006: 33

<sup>36</sup> *Dəli Mustafa Nəgşibəndi təriqəsinə məxsus sonuncu Sufi dərvişlərdən biri kimi yadda qalmışdır. Ruhi ekstaz vəziyyətinə düşəndə samavar qynaya-qaynaya suyunda abdəst (dəstəmaz) alar, bəzən də yanar kösövü dili ilə söndürərmiş.*

an indication that the genre's origin lies in dervishism. Nevertheless, the conclusion of some authors such as Balasadiq is '*meyxananın tarixi dərvişliklə ölçülür*,' the history of meykhana is measured by dervishism' (Balasadiq 2003: 60). At the same time, however, the author writes that this is a theoretical conclusion. There is no evidence that confirms it as a fact. Balasadiq notes that to some extent one can feel the resemblance between meykhanas and dervish odes.

'The dervish says words by hitting the *kəşkül*<sup>37</sup> on the floor and circling in the gatherings. He/she sometimes does not use poetic odes but expresses his experiences by improvising about certain subject – as meykhana poets do. Even the rhythm of the odes he is reading/singing is similar or the same as meykhana's rhythm'<sup>38</sup> (Ibid)

### 3.2 Account of Meykhana Genre in Other Local Sources

The positive attitude towards meykhana mentioned above was maintained after 90ies previous century. Accordingly, we find ethnographic, historic, folkloristic sources about Baku and Baku villages, which include *meykhana* in their accounts. However, these accounts are heterogeneous, for example Vəli Həbiboglu, Qilman İlkin, and Hüseynqulu Sarabski have all described meykhana gatherings:

Meykhana battles used to be very popular in former days. Even now this old art of words, the genre meykhana, is successfully applied in village weddings. The guests of the wedding ceremony enjoy listening to good words. The wedding becomes even more fun to be at. It is said that our prominent poets Mixail Müşviq, Suleyman Rustəm and Səməd Vurğun and other used to utter meykhana very well. Among others, Əliaga Vahid was respected both for his very beautiful ghazels and for his meykhanas. It is necessary for the person who performs meykhana to have excellence in aruz and to have an ear for music. The person during a very short period of time should be able to improvise poetry to the thought that is suddenly suggested or to the rhyme that is suddenly suggested. This demands from the performer a great deal of mastery and courage. The meykhana poet has to have a great reserve of words. He has to compose a poem immediately and even be able to hypnotize the person he battles against (Həbiboglu 2003: 907).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Kəşkül - a wooden object used by dervishes to collect money.

<sup>38</sup> *Dərviş kəşkülünü yerə döyər-döyər məclisi dövrə vurub söz deyir. O, bəzən şair gəsidəsindən istifadə etmir müəyyən bir predmetin ətrafında öz təəssüratlarını bədahətən həm di ustalıqla nəzmə çəkə bilir-meyxana şairi kimi. Hətta onun oxuduğu gəsidənin ritmi də meyxana ritminə yaxın ya da eyni olur.*

<sup>39</sup> *Vaxtla toyxanalarda meyxanaçıların dəyişməsi çox geniş yayılmışdır. Elə indinin əzində də bu gədim*

Qılman İlkin writes:

The wedding used to continue for some days and sometimes a week. After the wedding would finish, the close friends of the groom used to gather and say meykhana. All sitting in a circle, two of them would sit in the middle and start to improvise. The performers are usually people who like improvisational poetry. In their poetry, the satire and humour used to be mixed. The refrain is repeated by everybody in chorus sitting in a circle. Sometimes meykhanas could be accompanied also with *dumbek*<sup>40, 41</sup> (İlkin 2006: 340-341).

Hüseynqulu Sarabski, a director, composer and actor, commented about *meykhana* in the context of its performance in wedding parties:

After most of the people left, the close group of the wedding host invite relatives, the poets into the centre areas of the gathering.<sup>42</sup> They were offered the qaval<sup>43</sup> in their hands. Sometimes the qaval was given to a person who was not performing. Such meykhanas could not be performed by one, but by two. These people were to battle against each other. And the refrain of the piece had to be repeated in chorus by the people around (Ədəbiyyat və incəsənət gazet, 1983, 25 fevral).<sup>44</sup>

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*söz sənəti, meyxana janrı bir çox kənd toylarında uğurla istifadə edilir. Toy şənliyinə gələnlar yaxşı söz eşitməklə feyziyyab olurlar. Toy daha da şən keçir. Deyilənə görə, vaxtilə görkəmli şairlərimizdən Mixail Müşviq, Suleyman Rustəm, Səməd Vurğun və başqaları yaxşı meyxanalar deyirlərmiş. Xalq arasında həm gözəl qəzəlxan, həm də meyxana deyən bir şair kimi Əliağa Vahidin böyük nüfuzu olmuşdur.*

*Meyxana deyən şəxs mütləq əruz vəznini yaxşı bilməli, musiqi duyumu olmalıdır... Çox qısa müddət ərzində o, bədahətən verilmiş fikir və yaxud gəfiyə ətrafında şeir goşmalı və ritmlə onu dinləyicilərə çatdırmalıdır. Bu, meyxanaçıdan böyük ustalıq, məharət tələb edir, meyxana şairinin söz ehtiyatı geniş olmalıdır, o hər bir mövzuya aid dərhal şeir göşməli, lazım gələrsə dəyişdiyi şəxsi bağlamağı da bacarmalıdır*

<sup>40</sup> Dumbek- Hand drum also called dumbelek, darabukka, derbocka,

<sup>41</sup> «Toy bir neçə gün və bəzən bir həftə uzanırdı. Toy qurtarıb, camaat dağılışandan sonar bəyin yaxın adamları yığılıb meyxana deyərtilər. Dövrə vurub adamlardan iki nəfər ortada oturub meyxanaya başlardı. Meyxana deyənlər, adətən bədahətən şeir deyən şair təbiətli adamlardı, Bəhsə girişir, bir-birilərini və habelə ayrı-ayrı adamların eyblərini tənqid edirdilər. Onların deyişmələrində satira və yumor bir birinə qarışırdı. Şeirlərin nəqəratını dövrə vurub oturmuş adamlar təkrar edirdilər. Meyxana bəzi hallarda dünbəklə də müşayiət olunurdu,

<sup>42</sup> Here used meydana cekmek-which means challenge, encourage, to put into some kind of test, Meydan – square, market place.

<sup>43</sup> Percussion instrument widely used in classical and folk music.

<sup>44</sup> «Adamalar dağılışandan sonra toy sahibinin yaxın adamları, gohumları, toyda iştirak edən şair təbiətli adamları meydana çəkərək, məclisin ortasında əyləşdirirəlinə də bir qaval verirdilər. Bəzən qavali başqa dirisi çalırdı. Belə meyxana deyənlər tək deyil. İki nəfər olmalı idi. Bunlar bir-biri ilə deyişməli idilər. Onların sözlərinin nəqəratı təclisə toplananlar tərəfindən xorla təkrar edilməli idi »

## 4 The Poetry of Meykhana

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### 4.1 Rhyme

Rhyme in meykhana is not created with phonetics or the written appearances of words in mind, but on the basis of similarities in how words are heard. That element gives meykhana an opportunity for words to be playfully perverted with the help of different devices e.g. dialect, code-switching<sup>45</sup> between Russian and Azeri words, and onomatopoeic construction. What each artist puts into the words colours the mode of the utterance. This creates the mood that affects the performance and audience. That quality is bidirectional: the more colourful the performance, the more audience will cheer for it and the more audience cheers, the more colourful the performance will be. Improvisers are endowed with a wide range of tools in order to narrate different points of view. Rhyming in Azerbaijani or in any Turkic language can be relatively easy to achieve. The vowel harmony and suffix system stimulates the abovementioned. For example: *gəlirəm*, *gedirəm*, *görürəm*, *yeyirəm* (I come, I go, I see, I eat, respectively) – the words all rhyme with each other supported by the suffix vowel +rƏm: presented in the first person singular. In the demonstration of this construction one can see that in order to be able to make a rhyming structure one does not have to have extensive talent, knowledge or long-term experience. Neither is any special word database necessary in order to make rhymes in meykhana. However, this does not mean that one does not find elegant rhyming poetry in *meykhana*. Hacı Qəzəlxan notices that the quality of *meykhana* and artistic poetic skills are more concerned with poetic *content*, due to the fact that the talent of a meykhana performer (in Azerbaijani: *meyxanaçı*) is not measured by his skill in rhyming. Thus, performers rather focus on having a deep, personal message than on delivering a beautifully rhyming piece. What I also notice from the video clips is that the more aggressive the message is, the more cheering the performer gets from the audience.

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<sup>45</sup> Code-switching, a linguistic term which shows the simultaneous use of more than one language or language variety in conversation. People who speak several languages sometimes use elements of multiple languages in conversations with each other.

## 4.2 Rhyming Formulas

In meykhana one can encounter all the classical forms of Azerbaijani rhyming architecture: crossed (in Azerbaijani: *çarpaz*) (ABAB); mixed (in Azerbaijani: *qarışiq*) (ABAB, BABA, BBAA, BAAA); round (in Azerbaijani: *dairəvi*) (ABBA); whole (in Azerbaijani: *bütöv*) (AAAA); and so on. The most common type of rhyming structure I have encountered in the poetries I have read and lyrics I have listened to is AA, BBBA, AA, CCCA, AA, DDDA, AA. (For rhyme in meykhana with more than four-line stanzas, cf. chapter 5) This main carrier of the rhyme AA is called *qafiye* (in Azerbaijani *qafiyə*),<sup>46</sup> usually a double strophe (in Azerbaijani: *beyt* or *qoşa misra*). These *qafiyes* usually do not only carry the main rhyming pattern of the poetry, but also the main meaning is concentrated in them. The main moral idea of the refrain follows for the rest of the improvisation. Meykhanas have a form of chain-like development from verse to verse but one and the same plot idea, which is introduced in *qafiye* similar to *refrain* is followed, independently of how many performers are involved. These *qafiyes* are creating the frames, the metric and contextual schemata for improvisation. Sometimes the *qafiye*, which performers usually get from the audience, is not a double strophe, but has different forms, for instance a single strophe, or a phrase in a strophe and all the participants build their narratives accordingly to this rhyming structure they want to apply. There are myriad forms of *qafiyes* that can be offered, depending on one's imagination. Those *qafiyes*, which similar to refrains are usually said in chorus by all the participants (in some sources also defined as a refrain, under the name *nəqarət*, and each performer starts their improvisation after that. Two of the main rules mentioned by several of my informants are that *qafiyes* must never have been used earlier, the act called *vaygirlık* (for example, *vaygirlık eləmək olmaz-repetition is not allowed*) and that poetry has to be original and meaningful.

*The politics of Gorbachev are going at high-speed*

*How fashionable perestroika has become*

*Come and try to separate the truth from the lie*

*separate the ordinary thief from the thief wearing a tie*

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<sup>46</sup> In English the translation of the word *qafiyə* is *rhyme*. Since in meykhana this term has a different function in addition to rhyme, namely the carrier for main rhyme I will use the term *qafiye* for that purpose.

*I do not make any sound, because I am afraid  
the neighbour is on strike, boycotting  
How fashionable perestroika has become*

*The politics of Gorbachev are going at high-speed  
How fashionable perestroika has become*

*Qorbaçovun politikası xoddadu<sup>47</sup>  
Peresstroyka nə yaman moddadu*

*Gəl yalanı indi ayır doğrudan  
Qalstuklu oğrunu seç oğrudan  
Mən səsimi çıxarmıram qorxudan  
Qonşu zabastovkada, baykotdadu  
Peresstroyka nə yaman moddadu*

*Qorbaçovun politikası xoddadu  
Peresstroyka nə yaman moddadu<sup>48</sup>*

*Doğrudan, oğrudan and qorxudan: all three rhyme and three syllables and doğru, oğru and qorxu have the same vowel harmonic structure, namely of round vowels.*

Both rhymes and the content of qafiyes create frames for the rest of the poem.

Another similar example:

*Drive this car slowly, for God's sake, driver  
one cannot see anything, it is a fog, driver*

*The world knows you drink behind the wheel,  
Where do you harvest, where do you seed?  
In red traffic light you drive through like you are fearless.*

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<sup>47</sup> *Xod-* is the stem of the Russian word *xodum*, to go. *Xod-da* is a contraction consisting of Russian stem and Azerbaijani suffix (dA-lokativ in Azerbaijani). It can be translated as *to be in speed, to be fast also to be offensive*. In addition *boykotdadu, moddadu, xoddadu* used in Baku dialect. The standart Azerbaijani forms are *boykotdadır, moddadır, xoddadır*.

<sup>48</sup> Balasadiq 1993:152

*Compared to you, the aeroplane is a lie, driver  
Drive this machine slowly, for God's sake, driver. It is a chaos unseen,  
it creates a thick fog, where one can not see through, driver<sup>49</sup>*

*Asta sür maşını amandır sürcü<sup>50</sup>  
Göz gözü görmür dumandu sürcü*

*Bunu aləm bilir rulda içirsən  
Sən harda əkirləs, harda biçirsən?  
Qırmızı işıqda zonnu keçirsən  
Təyyara yanında yalandır Sürcü.  
Asta sür maşını amandır sürcü  
Göz gözü görmür dumandu sürcü*

*İçirsən Biçirsən, Keçirsən* - these words are also in perfect vowel harmony.  
Accordingly we get the kind of rhyme which is called whole (in Azerbaijani: *tam*) or rich (in Azerbaijani: *zengin*) rhyme.

Here I wish to mention that the theme of cars has been a popular theme among performers. An example is a humorous meykhana about the overexploited consumption of cars in the villages of Baku without the corresponding infrastructure such as good asphalt roads.

*A car from here, a car from there  
As if everybody lost his or her heads*

*A big zil<sup>51</sup> is given to a little boy  
His speedometer shows hundred forty miles  
They give fifteen years' sentence per head  
The judge does not ask the driver's age*

*A car from here, a car from there*

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid:132

<sup>50</sup> colloquial form of *sürcü*

<sup>51</sup> Zil- is a major Russian truck. Abbreviation from Zavod imeni Likhachova, Russian: Завод имени Лихачёва (ЗиЛ), literally "Factory named after Likhachov"

*As if everybody lost their heads*<sup>52</sup>

*Oyandan maşın, buyandan maşın*

*Adam itirib ele bil başın*

*Balaca uşağa böyük zil verir*

*Spidometeri yüz girx mil verir*

*Adam daşına on beş il verir*

*Sudya soruçmur sürücünün yaşın*

*Oyandan maşın, buyandan maşın*

*Adam itirib ele bil başın*

It is appropriate to mention that a couplet taken out from the context and the social environment of its creation does not fully make sense. The fact that my readers approach the couplet not in the original language also means potentially that the words can lose their effect. Here my intention is not to enlighten the message the couplet carries, but show the reader that meykhana's are various and colourful.

Usually meykhana's rhymes are at the end of the lines, but it should not be seen as a rule without exception, since the nature of the art is improvisation created in the moment. Sometimes phonetically similar words that rhyme can come at the beginning or the middle of the line. But to make them work with each other, in order to keep the rhythm, it is necessary that they come at the same place in lines.

#### 4.3 Meykhanas with Redif (in Azerbaijani: Rədifli meyxanalar)

The word *redif* originally meant 'a person who rides into battle on the back of someone else's saddle', so the redif rides behind the rhyme and is the same in every rhyming line (Andrews & Black & Kapakli 1997:17), namely there is a repeated

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<sup>52</sup> The stanzas are sung to me by Hacı Əli, on 16th of October 2010 (originally performed by Ağa Səlim in the mid-60s).



word, which comes after the rhyme. The words repeated as redifs strengthen poetic harmony and accent its significant place. The redif is not only exploited by *meykhana* performers, but it was used widely in the repertoires of classical poets, both Azerbaijani and Ottoman, for instance Füzuli, Vidadi, Vagif, Sabir, etc. ‘Sevdalı dilbər’ by Nizami Rəmzi is an example of a *meykhana* with redif.

*My lovely love, beauty in love  
The extract of my love, beauty in jewels  
Your absence made my heart hunt  
You are the most beautiful deer of the mountains*<sup>53</sup>

*Sevimli Sevgilim, sevdalı **dilbər**  
Eşqimin kövhəri, cəlalı **dilbər**  
Vüsəlin gəlbimi səyyad eylədi  
Dağların ən gözəl maralı **dilbər***

Here, the repeated word in first, second and forth line, *dilbər*, is a redif. The rhyme itself lies in *sevdalı*, *cəlalı*, *maralı*, which all end in *-alı*, where the *-a* belong to the stem of the words *sevda*, *cəla*, and *-lı* is a suffix meaning ‘belonging, containing’.

Nizami Rəmzi has been mentioned. Today he is known as the *meykhana* performer who brought melody and voice into the genre, and he was the first performer to produce audiocassettes. He is known as a founder of modern *meykhana*, making it more musical and melodic. He has also been known for his critical texts and has been arrested for his *meykhanas* about (among other things) bribery in the Soviet Union, and excessive beaurocracy (Nəcəfzadə 2002: *Ön söz*).

I want to show another example, to elucidate the main differences between qafiyəs and redifs.

*When you come to the village and garden, you call for me, beautiful  
I love you very much, you should love me also, beautiful  
  
Where have you gone, hey girl, I have called for you  
I have cherished you and have kept you in my heart*

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<sup>53</sup>

Nəcəfzadə 2010: 67

*I have really loved you so much*

*I am saying these words a hundred times, after each other, beautiful*

*When you come to the garden and lakes, call for me, beautiful*<sup>54</sup>

*Gələndə kəndə-bağa, bir məni də səslə **gözəl**,*

*Mə səni çox istəyirəm, sən də məni istə **gözəl**,*

*Sən hara getmişən, ay qız, səni mən səsdəmişəm,*

*Səni mən əzizləyib, öz qəlbimdə bəsdəmişəm,*

*səni mən doğrudan da o qədər istəmişəm,*

*Bu sözü mən deyərəm yüz dəfə üst-üstə **gözəl**,*

*Gedəndə göl bağına gəl məni də səslə, **gözəl***

The word *gözəl*, ‘beautiful’ in the first, second, sixth and seventh lines is a repeating redif. Redifs are usually similar to rhymes in their forms, they contain the idea of the poem and their place is at the end of lines, and they contribute to completing the logic of the composition. The redifs are the same repeating words, while qafiyes are different words, which rhyme with each other. I think compared to qafiyes they have more laconic qualities and embody the main tonality of the stanza. Each time when we encounter the same word, in different combinations with other words, it helps maintain the same mood throughout the poem. Not least the use of redifs makes it so that the poem is easily memorized.

Redifs on the Internet forum [www.meyxana.net](http://www.meyxana.net) are called closed rhymes (*bağlı qafiyə*), while rhymes without redifs are called open rhymes (*açıq qafiyə*).

As you may notice, the theme of both these meykhanas above is love. As far as I can see, there are very few *meykhanas* concerning love and love for women, as is usually the case in eastern ghazels. The reason for choosing those stanzas has been that qafiyes in those lines introduced to a reader have been in full vowel harmonic structure.

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<sup>54</sup>

Balasadig 1993:93

#### 4.4 Double strophe meykhanas (in Azerbaijani: Beyt meyxanalar)

Double strophe *meykhanas* or beyt meykhanas are different from other types of meykhanas. As is clear from the name, *beyt*, these are meykhanas that consist of double rhyming lines, also called *qoşa misra*, meaning double line. Two lines create one beyt. But not all lines after each other can be considered as one beyt. To be defined as one beyt, lines have to ‘complete’ each other, and the meaning has to be fulfilled. For instance:

*As a crazy, my beloved I cry out, I burn  
As a butterfly in a candle, my beloved, I burn in a fire of love*<sup>55</sup>.

*Dəli divanetek, ey yar, hayqırıram, hey yanıram  
Şama pərvanətək, ey yar, eşq odunda odlanıram*

Abovementioned is an example of beyt meykhana. But beyt meykhanas should not be mixed with the meykhana’s refrain part, which usually consist also of one double strophe, usually called *qafiye*. Qafiyas are used as the refrain part of meykhanas. In most cases lyrics are unified with the help of the these two lines, said in chorus by all participants. In beyt *meykhanas* the whole *meykhana* piece consist of double strophes, both refrain and verses.

An example for beyt meykhanas:

*Let us respect meykhana,  
Look up to meykhana*

*Gəlin eyləyək hörməti meyxanəyə,  
Bəsləyək rəğbəti meyxanəyə*

or:

*Let us keep the rhyme of Vahid,  
Let us hear the voice of Vahid*<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Nəcəfzadə 2002:38

<sup>56</sup> Aliğa Vahid, well-known ghazel and meykhana artist.

*Gəlin tutaq qafiyəsin Vahidin,  
Goy eşidək bir də səsin Vahidin*

An example of qafiye of meykhana, as quoted above:

*The politics of Gorbachev is going at high-speed,  
How fashionable perestroika has become*

*Gorbochovun politikasi moddadir,  
Perestroyka ne yaman moddadir,*

And on the previous page:

*When you come to the village and garden, you call for me, beautiful,  
I love you very much, you should love me also, beautiful.*

*Gələndə kəndə-bağa, bir məni də səslə gözəl,  
Mən səni çox istəyirəm, sən də məni istə gözəl,*

It is, however, not an absolute that beyts have to rhyme, even if the beyts chosed above are all rhyming.

#### 4.5 Rhymeless meykhanas (in Azerbaijani: *Qafiyəsiz meyxanalar*)

Rhymeless meykhanas have a free nature when it comes to the number of syllables and poetic structure. Rəhimova classifies *bedihes* (poetry rhythmically similar to *meykhana* with shorter lines) under the group of rhymeless meykhanas (Rəhimova 2003: 17). The validity of this classification is, however, weak. Very few *bedihes* that I have read do not rhyme. Therefore I would like to keep these two subgenres separate. *Bedihes* possess almost the same performative qualities as meykhanas, but with more playful content than meykhanas (cf. chapter 4.6). Although rhymeless meykhanas are not as popular as other subgenres of meykhana, one can still find them in the repertoires of some performers. The following stanza can be qualified as a rhymeless meykhana.

*Boy, what a howl you have created*

*because of a little candy  
do not approach my sorrow  
you should live with a big fat sorrow yourself<sup>57</sup>*

*Nə həşr salıbsan, oğlan  
Bir arıq konfetdən<sup>58</sup> ötrü?  
Dərdimi hürkütmə, yoxsa  
Ətli-yağlı dərd görəsən*

#### 4.6 Bedihes (In Azerbaijani: Bədihələr)

From the matter of content *bedihes* are different from *meykhanas*. They are improvisational like *meykhanas* but they have fewer syllables and shorter lines, similar to rhymeless *meykhanas*. They contain less opinionated critiques of things, rather they have a more playful and teasing nature.

*Roll your eyes and eyebrows  
Make my heart ache  
Look at this, meykhana performer  
Do not count on this Bağır<sup>5960</sup>*

*Qaş gözüünü süzgilən,  
Ürəyimi üzgilən,  
Meyxanaçı, görgilən  
Bu Bağır müxtəsər*

#### 4.7 The Rhythm of Meykhana

The involvement of music with *meykhana* is a new phenomenon, starting, as has been

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<sup>57</sup> Balasadiq 1993: 27

<sup>58</sup> konfet, from russian *конфета* which means candy

<sup>59</sup> author of the *bedihe*

<sup>60</sup> İmaməliyev 2003: 19

claimed, with Nizami Rəmzi.<sup>61</sup> What makes the utterance of meykhana characteristic is its rhythm. The peculiarity of meykhana's utterance consists of applying poetic text into a metric rhythm (not melodic). This feature draws meykhana's utterance closer to aruz prosodic poetry than lyrics in a syllabic format. Aruz is not a musical rhythm but a poetic metre. This rhythm I wish to refer to in the way some of my informants tried to describe it for me, also commented about in the web forums: *the rhythm of 'Üç badam bir Qoz'*<sup>62</sup> is the name of a well-known folk song. It can be described by playing a rhythm on a table as my informant Farid did and making the sound *chikkada chikka chikkada chikka*, --U-U, --U-U (short short long short long, short short long short long). The main reason, in my opinion, why meykhanas sound as if they follow aruz is that they can be broken down into feet, a quality absent from songs; songs usually follow the melody.

As mentioned above, the metric genre used by meykhana is more similar to ancient system of Middle Eastern literature called aruz than the syllabic or free poetic meter. This system is not determined by the number of syllables in one line, but by a pattern of short and long syllables. There are a number of metres and variations of metres (in Azerbaijani: *bəhr*), each of which is divided into a definite number of feet (in Azerbaijani: *təfilə*). Feet are divided into a determined number of long and short syllables, following one another in a particular order. In all these metres, or variations of metres, the author follows this system. It is appropriate to mention that aruz a priori does not fit the structure of the Turkic languages, since they do not have long vowels as Arabic and Persian do. (However, a syllable is regarded as long also if it consists of a short vowel followed by two consonants.) Aruz was developed first in Arabic literature (from the sixth to seventh centuries), then in Persian literature (from the ninth), and was applied to Turkic literature from the eleventh century onwards. Every group that has implemented aruz has approached it creatively when they have adopted it into their own language. Chagatay poetry is considered to be the most excellent of Turkic poetry, and is known for its passion for aruz. The metre has undoubtedly set the frame for the performative and poetic excellence of the region. Not only verses, lines, phrases and words, but also syllables and sounds should be followed correctly and systematically in each strophe. For the person not familiar with the rhythms of aruz, it is

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<sup>61</sup> Transcript of the interview with Hacı Qəzəlxan. 28.10.11  
<sup>62</sup> In English: three almonds, one walnut.

hard even to read, if not compose. That same intonational pattern of the order of long and short syllables in the strophes is what makes *meykhana* sound similar to aruz. Note that the sound of meykhana is similar to aruz, not that meykhanas are improvised in aruz meter. What is rhythmically general for all meykhanas poetry and lyrics is the systematic length of the syllables, and the order of them, repeating in each strophe in the way described above. Here we witness that the rhythm of meykhana above all (content and form) becomes a juncture point between ‘authentic’ and ‘show’ meykhanas. The lyrics can be decorated with vowels pronounced short or long by artificially lengthening them at the same place in each line, in order to give the utterance the taste of aruz. Vowel harmony, rhythm and intonation of the utterances in this pattern sound more appealing for local ears, I imagine, since similar rhythms are encountered also in other folkloristic genres.

In my opinion, the metre of aruz that corresponds most to meykhana’s utterance is the aruz metre of *Səri*. Its lexical meaning is ‘fast, quick and speedy’. The Azerbaijani classical poet Mirzə Ələkbər Sabir (1862-1911) was a frequent user of *Səri*, and in some of his poetry one can hear intonational and rhythmic similarities with meykhanas. However in meykhana the order of short and long vowels is not static as they are in aruz but more free.

With all due respect to the aruz features, the completeness of the sentences and the meaningfulness of the sentences should not be downgraded in importance. Without meaningful substance in the improvisation, performers could not attract the attention of the audience, even if the poem composed was in the finest aruz pattern. Naturally, in order to compose within the frame of the abovementioned three requirements (rhyme, meaningful sentences and rhythm), lyricists ought to have both a solid personal vocabulary and important messages in order to gain a place among respected meykhana performers.

Meykhana is an improvisational art, and the use of other poetic metres from the region such as syllabic metre Heca and free metre *Sərbəst* can also be found within it.

### **Free metre**

*Navai has been the poet*

*No one is as good as him at poetry*<sup>63</sup>

*Şair olub Navai*

*Ondan başqa olmayıbdır savayı*

### **Syllabic**

*Let's see knee to knee, let me say meykhana*

*Do not forget my words, gather the pearls*<sup>64</sup>

*Gəl oturub diz dizə mən deyim meyxanəni*

*Unutma bu sözləri yığginəm dürdanəni*

As mentioned above, aruz features can be easily distorted in meykhana. Distortions are particularly noticeable when meykhana is sung. There is a growing tendency to synthesize meykhana with melodies and musical instruments (synthesizers), when it is produced in the studios. Musical involvement and growing electronic production draws meykhana closer to getting the same appreciation that popular songs get today, and its public figures are exposed to the same media environment that national celebrity artists experience. This trend of melodic meykhana has given the genre an attractive public 'face'. It has gained huge popularity and a large number of performers have gained celebrity status. This development has in my opinion taken place parallel to the fact that more meykhanas today are done in syllabic and free metre than having aruz-like features, since free and syllabic metres more easily can be adjusted to melodies.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, meykhana became not only legal to practise but also very widely appreciated. Undoubtedly, the fact that the queen of Azerbaijani pop music today, Aygun Kazimova, had a hit song featuring the *meykhana* artist Namiq Garaçuxurlu, was another acknowledgment for the genre in the public eye and ear. Today meykhana performers accompany popular singers, record songs, produce CDs and perform battles in television competitions like *De Gəlsin* and *Sözüm var* (on Ans TV and Space TV, respectively). In the entertainment business the difference

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<sup>63</sup> Lyrics of *Aşıq çalır sazı pulun xətrinə*. Transcript of the case study. Date 25.03.10, 05.04.10, 08.04.10, 19.04.10

<sup>64</sup> Pearls here most probably mean his words (as pay attention to the words).



between meykhana and song is not so great. It is simply that one is more accented on rhythm, the other on melody. The well-known contemporary hip-hop artist Elşad Xose featured the meykhana performer Vahid Qədim in the highly appreciated hit song of 2009, ‘*Şou Biznes*’ (‘Show Business’). The song sounds like contemporary western hip-hop music but has a meykhana rhythm. Meykhana borrows elements dynamically from hip-hop and pop songs, and also brings in arabesque-like eastern musical features. Usually the refrain part of a pop song is repeated and this occurs, as we have pointed out, also in meykhanas. But unlike songs, the rhythm that dominates a meykhana is part of the verse and not only of the refrain. It is as if the verse and chorus parts have changed places. Although interaction with popular song has lifted meykhana to the level of national acknowledgment, this has been greeted very critically by many, including Tağısoy<sup>65</sup> and Əlili,<sup>66</sup> among others. To quote Tağısoy, ‘As if they do a pioneering job. But they do not know that this new way of utterance confuses people even more and destroys their taste. It is possible that in twenty years people will think that meykhana is an art to be sung.’<sup>67</sup>

## 5. Structural and Compositional Properties of Meykhana’s Poetry

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Generally, one stanza of rhyming meykhana consist of four to six lines, and each line consists of between eight and eleven syllables. Meykhanas usually are between ten and fifteen stanzas but they can be up to twenty stanzas.

One stanza can consist of two to six or more lines. As pointed out above under 4.1.1, in four-line meykhanas, three lines generally rhyme and the fourth consist of constantly recurring word, phrase or line. For instance, note a meykhana stanza from the repertoire of Bəyməmməd Məmmədzadə (Şağani).

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<sup>65</sup> ...və bunula da guya ki, meyxanaya yenilik gətirirlər. Daha bilmirlər ki, bu yeni üslub, yenilikçi ifa xalqı çaşdırır, zövqü korlayır, əsl meykhana isasını unutturur. Bəlkə də onbeş iyirmi ildən sonra xalq elə biləcək ki, meyxanayı oxuya.oxuya ifa edirlər.

<sup>66</sup> Space Tv. Cavad Günəşli: 01.11.2010, link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htHMQWgRefs>

<sup>67</sup> Transcript of the interview, Tağısoy N. 25.10.11

*The wheel of God is turning, like it is the stream of the water  
 Be careful, pay attention, its flow is good  
 Crows have been squealing about me up [up in the political system]  
 fifty have registered for the verdict for my death, I am dying*<sup>68</sup>

*Dolanır Çərxi Fələk belədir suyun axarı,  
 Qıl nəzər diqqət elə, yaxşıdır axar-baxarı  
 Qarğalar məndən otrü verib ərizə yuxarı  
 qətlimə fərman üçün əlli çalağan, ölürəm*

Rəhimova argues that in meykhana with four-line stanzas the first two lines are structurally very similar. The third line is where the main idea, the point and the meaning is emphasized or illuminated. The third lines of these four lines carries a main message, wherein the point of the stanza is revealed, in addition to giving room to illuminate the performer's personal reaction. *Bayatis*, four-line poetry, an important element of Azerbaijani poetic folklore, in Rəhimova's arguments (Rəhimova 2002:12,13) possess a similar epistemic feature to four line meykhana. I have discovered many examples, which can support the abovementioned statement of Rəhimova.

*I will tell you a word, look closely  
 There is no friend among coming, going, returning  
 A friend for one can only be a motherland  
 If you want I can even swear on the Koran*<sup>69</sup>

*Bir söz deyim mən sənə, bax yetənnən  
 Dost olar insana ancaq vənənnən  
 Dost olmaz gəlib-gedib geyitənnən*<sup>70</sup>  
*İstəyirsən lap and içim Gu'ranə*

In meykhana consisting of five-line stanzas, as far as I can see usually the first three lines rhyme, and then the fourth and fifth rhyme.

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<sup>68</sup> Imaməliyev 1993: 25

<sup>69</sup> Balasadiq 1993: 139

<sup>70</sup> yetənnən and vətənnən and qeyitənnən are colloquial forms of the words *yetəndan*, *vətəndan*, *qayıdandan*. Geyitənnən in addition used in Baku dialect.

*And now let us talk of these terrible streets  
Let us talk of these dark nights  
Let us talk about the puddles and splashes  
The ones who pass through, pass through, ones who are drowning I have seen  
Here in some place, it is something I have seen<sup>71</sup>*

*İndi də bərbad küçələrdən deyək  
Burda qaranlıq gecələrdən deyək  
Nohurlarla gölməçələrdən deyək  
Keçən keçir, orda batan görmüşəm  
Ay bu filan yerdə filan görmüşəm*

In meykhana where one stanza consists of six lines, the first three lines rhyme, and then the second three lines rhyme.

*Football players kick the ball so hard  
That they almost either break their legs or arms  
The one who can not perform the role  
Run fast and hide in a bush as a rabbit  
If they would even knot my arms together  
I would do a mistake if I would support football<sup>72</sup>*

*Futbolistlər ele vurur futbolu  
Az qalır sınısın qıçı, çıxsın qolu  
Hansı ki ifa ede bilmir rolunu  
Dovşan kimi qaçır tez girir kola  
Əgər məni bağlasalar qol-qola  
Qələt edərim, balet edərim futbola*

### 5.1 Monologue meykhana

Meykhana can be in the form of dialogue or monologue. In monologue meykhana,

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<sup>71</sup> Balasadiq 1993: 82

<sup>72</sup> Imamaliyev 1993:54

one performer speaks all the poetry. A monologic meykhana could start as follows.

*Hey people, know that I am the tricky picaresque one  
I am a mafioso, I am a fool, I am a beloved in your hearts  
I am a wine, I am intoxication, I am a violin, I am a tar<sup>73</sup>  
Shortly said, you should know I am the tricky picaresque one<sup>74</sup>*

*Ey camaat biliniz, hiyləgər əyyarı mənəm,  
Lotuyam, bambuluyam, könlünüzün yarı mənəm  
Mey mənəm, məsti mənəm, kaman mənəm, tar mənəm  
Müxtəsər, siz biliniz, hiyləgər əyyarı mənəm*

I assume the artists wish to mobilize their audience, and to achieve this they would want to have something in common with the rest of participants and to appeal to public opinion. This would lead to more cheering and pave the way for receiving a high score. The choice of themes also supports this assumption. For example, the theme most encountered in meykhana is the theme of the hometown. Almost every artist today has at least once sung about and praised his birthplace, and this is appealing to the crowd.

## 5.2 Dialogue Meykhanas: Battles (in Azerbaijani: Deyişmə, also Atışma)

A *dictionary of folklore and Tasavvuf literature* states: in Azerbaijani ashik poetry there are similarities between battle and *herbe zorba*-like processes with meykhanas (*Azərbaycan aşiq poeziyasındaki deyışmə, hərbe-zorba ilə meyxanalar arasında bir yaxınlıq vardır*) (Hacıyeva & Rihtim 2003: 215). My choice of terminology is based on the above and I will use the same terms of battle processes occurring in ashik art to cover meykhana art, since the processes occurring are similar.

Poetic battles in meykhana as a competitive improvisation are called *deyişmə* or *atışma*. The stem of the word is *de-* and *at-* ('to say/to tell of' and 'to throw/to shoot', respectively). The reciprocal suffix *-İş* is followed with the infinitive suffix of *-mƏ*. Poetic battles are interactive, developing and performative actions. This act is a

<sup>73</sup> String instrument mainly used in mugam genre.  
<sup>74</sup> Balasadiq 1993: 88

process occurring between two or more participants. The purpose of this act is to show their knowledge, and demonstrate their talent and their level of artistic performative competence to each other. Deyişmə (or atışma) has its own peculiar forms. Performers battle on one chosen topic and the *qafiye* from the first verse follows after each improvised verse. The poetic form and formal pattern the first performer uses, including qafiye or redif, is followed by the rest of the group.

The stanzas following are part of the meyxana poem entitled 'Meyxanada satmasan olmaz səni', in which the main logic is 'I am better than you', here literally 'I have no choice than to sell you...' The rhyme is aaab cccb dddb, eeeb fffb. Ağa Səlim, Məşədi Baba, Kərim, Vügar and Elçin are the names of the battlers.

### **Ağa Səlim**

*Son, you have made chaos around here  
I swear, you have reached me in meyxana  
Yesterday evening obviously you have sold me in that exact place  
I have no other choice than to sell you for the price of goat*

*Aləmi bir-birinə, bala gatmışuz  
Meykhanada vallah mənə çatmışuz  
Dünən gecə mənə burda satmışuz<sup>75</sup>  
Keçi giymətinə satmasam olmaz səni*

### **Məşədi Baba**

*Compared to me you are little bit taller  
You are wise man, in addition little bit reflective  
I am a Shepherd, Kerim<sup>76</sup>, but you are the sheep  
I have no other choice than to mix you into the flock*

*Mənə baxanda bir az uzun boylusan  
Ağsaqqalsan çox da götür qoylusan*

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<sup>75</sup> gatmışuz, çatmışuz, satmışuz- used in Baku dialect. In standart Azerbaijani: gatmışız, çatmışız, satmışız

<sup>76</sup> He is addressing a performer called Kərim

*Mən çobanam sən də Kərim qoyunsan  
Götürüb sürüyə gatmasam olmaz səni*

### **Kərim**

*Do not talk like this, hey Məşədi<sup>77</sup>, talk less  
Interfere in my business from little farther distance  
I was introduced to you only three days ago  
I have no other choice than to make fool of you five or ten days*

*Belə danışma ay Məşədi az danış  
Mənim işimə bir az qıraqdan qarış  
Mən səniyə üç gündü olmuşam tanış  
Beş - on gün fırlatmasam olmaz səni*

### **Vüqar**

*They do not talk and do not laugh  
When they cry, you see no tears  
They can not give you any support Ağə<sup>78</sup>  
I have no other choice than to drag you into the arena*

*Danışmayırlar bunlar gülməyirlər  
Ağlayanda göz yaşı silməyirlər  
Bular Ağə sənə ruh verə bilməyirlər  
Meydana gatmasam olmaz səni*

### **Elçin**

*Find a theme in meykhana which has not been told  
before you say, look at your microphone  
go Məşədi look at your appearance  
I have no other choice than to fry you colourfully.<sup>79</sup>*

*Meyxanada söz deməmiş konuya bax*

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<sup>77</sup> The previous performer

<sup>78</sup> He is addressing a first battler Ağə Səlim.

<sup>79</sup> Balasadiq 1993: 236-238.

*Əvvəl deməmişdən mikrofonu<sup>80</sup> bax*  
*Get Məşədi güzgüdə vid fasonu<sup>81</sup> bax*  
*Rəngbəreng gizartmasan olmaz səni*

The first performer uses ‘sell you for the price of goat,’ while the next battler says ‘mix you into the flock’ (flock of sheep), and the next says, ‘make a fool of you in five to ten days’ and so on. These are good examples of how meykhana battles are built and how performers belittle each other in a poetic way.

### 5.2.1. Stages of Battle

Ashiq improvisation shares a similar semantic structure with the battles of *meykhana*. A *meykhana*’s development during a performance, as in the improvised part of ashig performances, goes through different processes from the beginning to the end. Ashiq improvisation has three main phases, *dəvət*, *hərbə zorba* and *ayaq vermək*, terminology which I think could easily be used also to describe *meykhana*. *Dəvət* means ‘invitation’ in English, thus it is the stage of invitation, in which one performer invites the others to a poetic battle. That act of invitation is also called *söz meydanına çəkmək* - to draw somebody into the arena of words. Usually in this phase, in the first verse performers mention the names of poets with whom they wish to do battle.

#### **Elçin**

*In meykhana I have a philosophical meaning*  
*Do not assume I have an eye on your property*  
*I am also a poet, Kerim, I have something to say*  
*If Elçin warms up, he will make a scene*

*Meyxanada fəlsəfə-möcüzüm var*  
*Elə bilmə dövlətində gözüüm var*  
*Mən də şairəm ay Kərim sözüüm var*  
*Elçin gızıışsa gecə, meydan eliyər*

#### **Kərim**

<sup>80</sup> used in colloquial form. The correct form is mikrofonuna

<sup>81</sup> *vid fason* - both words are Russian. They are the words for ‘appearance’ and ‘form’, respectively. Fasonu is in addition used in colloquial form.

*Say a thousand times, the one who doesn't understand would not understand  
I would not make any coquetry here in meykhana  
I have prayed to Saint Abbas<sup>82</sup> for your name  
He would lynch you with your words<sup>83</sup>*

*Min dəfə de, ganmayacaq qanmaza,  
Meyxanada özümü goymaram naza  
Tapşırılmışam sizi Həzrəti Abbasa  
O sözünlə həşirdə divan eliyər*

The second phase, *hərbə zorba*, is a focal point, in which the artists show their knowledge and talent. The name of this act is taken from *hərbə zorba gəlmək*. First of all, note that *zorba* is the Azerbaijani equivalent of the words *tyrant*, *despot*, also *big*, *well grown*. The word *hərb* has the meaning of 'battle' and 'military'. So in my opinion, *hərbə zorba gəlmək* must mean to get into a fight or a combat situation. Usually this stage is more aggressive and opinionated. For example, the process which could be qualified as a *hərbə zorba* between Elçin and Məşədi Baba in the previous battle goes as follows.

### **Elçin**

*You are saying a word of miracle in meykhana  
You tease me, you talk of my eyebrows and eyes  
You are not ashamed to use my words against me  
I have no choice than make you cry tonight*

*Meykhanada söz-möcüzə deyirsən,  
İlişirsən qaşıma-gözümə dəyirsən  
Unutmayıb sözümü özümə deyirsən  
Bu gecə mən ağlatmasam olmaz səni*

### **Məşədi Baba**

*Don't force me, to make the words difficult,  
To pull out your eye and to make you blind*

<sup>82</sup>

Most probably a holy religious figure in Islam, *Al-Abbas ibn Ali*, is ment here,  
<sup>83</sup> Balasadiq 1993: 246-247



*How else could I make you angry  
I have no choice than make your hair go gray*

*Məni məcbur etmə sözü zor eyləyim  
çixardım sənə qözüvü<sup>84</sup> kor eyləyim  
Bəs nə yolnan mən səni dilxor eyləyim  
Bu başvi<sup>85</sup> ağartmasam olmaz sənə<sup>86</sup>*

The third and last stage of the *deyişmə* (atışma) is called *ayaq vermə*, and in this stage the opponents reveal their techniques of improvisation more clearly. This process is described by Balasadiq in his story *Sacrifice Me in the Name of Your God. Oh Sea of Golden Sands*, which will be introduced some pages below.

*Nuş ilə məntiq axtaraq  
ölçüsünə diqqət edək*

*Let's search for logic with pleasure  
And pay attention to its measure*

By these lines, a performer introduces a new stage in the battle. In this stage the performers follow the *qafiye* carefully after the *ayaq vermək* process starts, and improvise by creating parallel stories, which support each other's stories with less antagonism and more alliance. The term *ayaq vermek* (literally to give a foot) in the *ashiq* genre is a technical term, a meta-narrational device and a poetic tool. It is an invitation to next performer to take over. These lines, which talk about the poetic form of the improvisation, usually do not have a narrative building capacity but are a pause from narrative.

Although the *hərbə zorba* bragging and vaunting of oneself has an important place in performances and builds up excitement, in the approach to the end reconciliation and peaceful wishes for good fortune take place. Verses are improvised that calm the battle atmosphere between the opponents but also between them and audience. This is not an absolute, in that not every performer who battles uses this tool.

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<sup>84</sup> used in colloquial form. The correct form is *qözünü*

<sup>85</sup> used in colloquial form. The correct form *başını*

<sup>86</sup> Balasadiq 1993: 239

## Ağa Səlim

*They pulled out the grapes and ripped them from the roots  
they took away its golden sand, car after car  
they made cattle pasture on the wine leaves  
The honeycomb was wasted in the nails of the cattle  
so where is that honeycomb of the cottages of Absheron [peninsula]*

*Üzdülər tənəkləri, kötiyündən qopardılar,  
O qızıl qumlarını maşın-maşın apardılar  
Bıraxıb mal-qaranı meynəliyə otardılar,  
Şanı getdi fokuna mal-qara dirnaqlarının,  
Hanı ağ şanı bəs Abşeron bağlarının!*

## Hacı Qəni

*There were not enough cans for the pickles and syrups in the homes  
The pickles were not finished until the Novruz [local celebration of spring]  
the tables were full of sweets  
the bomb could not destroy the load of the attics  
so where is the prosperity of the cottages of Absheron!<sup>87</sup>*

*Evlərin qab-qacağı sirkə-doşabçın az idi,  
Rıçalı turşisini Novruza qurtarmaz idi  
kürsünün üstü bütün xüşkbar ilə saz idi  
Yükünü top da dağıtmazdı o çardaqlarının,  
Hanı gəlhagəl bəs Abşeron bağlarının!*

The term *bağlamag* is worth mentioning. It means to close or to stop. However, in the context of meykhana, this verb has another meaning, which is that the verses uttered have been so good that they have become undefeatable – The performer is so good that the next contestant cannot battle with him. It also can mean to advance on somebody. The term is met only through oral sources (can be found among lyrics as well as in my conversations with informants), therefore the lyrics from an interview will be used:

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<sup>87</sup>

Ibid 236

*I would not want to close X tonight  
 In the arena I would also not advance on him  
 I would not stop his words either in meykhana  
 But I would give in for the sake of money  
 Ashiq<sup>88</sup> plays a saz for the sake of money<sup>89</sup>*

*Mən bu gece bağlamaram X-i  
 Meydanda gəbəlamaram x-ı  
 Meyxanada bağlamaram x-ı  
 Amma olaram razı pulun xətrinə  
 Aşıq çalır sazı pulun xətrinə*

### 5.3 Storytelling meykhana (in Azerbaijani: Rəvayətli meyxanalar)

The oldest ‘storytelling’ meykhana I have found is ‘A Description of Muslim and Armenian Weddings in Baku in the Old Days’ (*Keşmişlərdə Bakıda müsəlman və erməni toylarının təsviri*), improvised by Mirzə Bağır (1810-1882) (Imaməliyev 1993: 9). The poetry tells the story of an episodic event, in which people’s behaviour, preparation for the wedding, the arrangement of guests, the dynamics between the guests, drunkenness, gifts of money, other gifts, the feast, people’s personal issues, the Armenian Grigor being toastmaster and lot more. The term ‘storytelling’ meykhana, namely *rəvayətli* meyxana, I first encountered in Balasadiq’s stories.

What makes storytelling meykhana different is that they are personal and have an individualistic architecture and character. The traditional oral folklore of the region includes storytelling as an important feature, as seen in epics partly dating back to the Middle Ages such as *Dede Gorgud Dastanı*<sup>90</sup> – in which personal narratives are combined with the stories of heroes. These are similar in structure to the storytelling meykhana. What is common in those pieces is that before the actual prose starts the narrator had an introductory sequence in which it is told what the story is about, or what the narrator’s role is, or the purpose of the narration.

<sup>88</sup> Ashiq is also a term related to a person performing ashig songs.

<sup>89</sup> This stanza were a part of an interview, and the name is left out due to the privacy of my informant.

<sup>90</sup> A ‘large body of epics narrating mythological and historical events and representing in a highly refined musical and poetic form, the customs and beliefs of a majority of the native population’ (Naroditskaya 2006: 14)

*I want to tell a story  
Sit and carefully listen to the story  
Look how hurt my soul is  
The scream of my grief was lifted to the heights  
I will tell you about Bakuvian consciousness  
the story of the weddings and pride<sup>91</sup>*

*İstəyirəm zahir edim hekayət  
Guş gılın, ta ki edim rəvayət  
Görün necə incidi canım mənim  
Ucaldı əflanı fəğanım mənim  
Şərh eləyim Bakılı insafını  
Toyların vəsfini, övsanını*

Or

*Fifty years ago  
Fathers gave information  
In the village of Mashtaga  
Between the people  
It was only die or kill  
It was about fighting each other  
There were a story  
There are many crimes<sup>92</sup>*

*Əlli il bundan qabaq  
Atalar verir soraq  
Maşağanın kəndində  
Adamların zəndində  
Ölüb öldürmək idi  
Bir-birin dövmək idi  
Var bir belə hekayət  
Çoxdur nahaq cinayət*

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<sup>91</sup> İmaməliyev 1993: 9  
<sup>92</sup> Ibid :103

The narratives of both meykhanas above gradually develop. This demonstrates the general environment and at the same time creates the grounds for imminent events and it is similar to generic framing devices such as ‘once upon a time’.

A very interesting meykhana, more precisely a rhyming fairy tale ‘Goat’ (in Azerbaijani: Keçi) with superstitious content about a king and his goat should be especially mentioned. (Imaməliyev 1993: 66) Here the frame used resembles the opening part of Turkic folktales, where before the actual story starts, the fairy tale is decorated with a surreal, incoherent and exaggerated opening. This involves sixty-four lines of poetry, of which the first twenty serve as an entrance to the main plot. The author intentionally exaggerates the improvisation by continuing the introductory part for too long, and not making any reference to the prose part. The twenty-first line is where the story starts:

(21) *It is told that, in the world with a generous master*

(22) *There was a ruthless king, tyrannical to the world...*

(21) *Böyle nəql eyleyir, o sahibi xəş teb-i nəvan*

(22) *Vardi bir padişahi zalim-i geddari cahan...*

Storytelling meykhanas became also a popular theme of meykhana in the media. The CD called *Rəvayət*, released in 2001 by Namiq Qaraçuxurlu, gained a large audience and put Qaraçuxurlu among national artists. Other album titles of Qaraçuxurlu include *Rəvayət, cavanlıq səhvi* (*Narrative, a Mistake of a youth*), *Rəvayət 1* (*Narrative 1*), *Rəvayət 2* (*Narrative 2*), *Yeni rəvayət* (*New Narrative*). There is also Sabır Kürdəxanlı’s *Rəvayət, acı taleh* (*Narrative, a Bitter Destiny*) and Nicat Mənalı’s *Dostluq rəvayəti* (*The Narrative of Friendship*) or *Rəvayət, məhhəbətim baş tutmadı* (*Narrative, my Love did not Succeed*) could be mentioned.

## **6. Meykhanas and its similarities with other traditions.**

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In this part of the thesis, I wish to draw reader’s attention to three genres with which I find meykhana has similarities. One is its similarity with the ghazel, which

applies to the visual appearance and the rhythm. Another is its performative similarities with other folk art genres, particularly with the *ashiq* genre, which is also a dialogic improvisation. Another performative similarity which can be mentioned is with local folkloristic traditions such as seasonal folk plays and ceremonies.

## 6.1 Ghazels and Meykhanas

For those familiar with Azerbaijani prosodic ghazels (mentioned in the introduction) they resemble meykhanas when one looks at them on paper. In addition, one can easily hear a resemblance in the rhythm and pronunciation between these two poetic genres. Since meykhana carries the characteristics of aruz meter in addition to rhyming qualities, meykhana can sound similar to ghazels (ghazels follow aruz meter). As already mentioned, the phonetic and syntactical system of Azerbaijani language, including the suffix system and the vocal harmony, also contributes to rhyming being beautifully achieved in poetry. Thus meykhana has in many cases been influenced by the compositional properties of ghazels. In fact, I have witnessed that meykhana in oral sources is sometimes referred to as ghazel. Performers are also called *qəzəlxan* (*ghazel master*), *meyxana ustası* (meykhana masters) *qafiye ustası* (rhyme master) and *söz ustası* (masters of words). Most ghazels can be uttered as meykhanas. But in order for ghazels to be meykhana they would have to be improvised. Besides, ghazels are mainly love poetry, which is not characteristic of meykhanas. In fact I have seen very few meykhanas about love.

To show the similarities between these two genres in written form, I present the following three *beyts*. The first two are *beyts* of ghazels and last one is a *beyt* of meykhana. I have purposely chosen these lines, in which the word *meykhana* occurs.

*If the wine of taverns did not resemble your lips  
The face of taverns would not be rose-coloured*<sup>93</sup>

*Ləbinə bənzəməsəydi meyi meyxanələrin,  
Lalərang olmaz idi çohrəsi meyxanərin*

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93      Vahid 1964: 191

*Yesterday night with my beloved in the gathering of conversation in the tavern  
We came to the point where we were intoxicated by the cups<sup>94</sup>*

*Dün gecə yarım ilə söhbəti-məclis meyخانədə  
Bir məğama yetişdik məst olduq peymanədə*

*Let us respect meykhana  
Let us look up to meykhana<sup>95</sup>*

*Gəlin eyləyək hörməti meyخانəyə  
Bəsləyəgin rəğbəti meyخانəyə*

Above we can see the common features in meykhana and ghazels: Two lines make one beyt, and these lines have to rhyme both in ghazels and meykhanas. Besides, the lines have to complete the logic of each other. If there are strophes following after that (the third, fourth, fifth), these also mostly rhyme (one can encounter exceptions to this pattern). The metric pattern (*behr*) used in the first line has to follow for the rest of the poem.

## 6.2 Ashiq and Meykhana Genres

Similarities with ashik culture have been mentioned and also pointed out by my informants. Talking of ashik we are concerned with professional folk music art (Беляев, 1971: 162), which meykhana also is, densely connected to an epic style of performance. While mass literature in Baku is meykhana, in the other cities of Azerbaijan it has been the musical poetry and riddle-natured dialogues of ashiks. While ashik improvisations are melodic, accompanied with a string instrument, a saz, meykhana has been rhythmic, accompanied with finger snapping and idiophonic or percussion instruments. Although poetic dialogues mainly in the forms of riddles are widely used in ashik art, in meykhana art those dialogues possess different

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94 This lines are from the ghazels of Məhəmmədəli Şəfai( 1890-1967)

95 From the interview dated October, 2010

peculiarities. Alongside with the folkloristic characteristics of meykhana, it has also inherited the features and elements of classical eastern metric poetry, as discussed above, which is an absent quality in ashıq art.

The similarities between these two traditions are improvisation, dialogue or battle, and also a sharp quickness. Both are rhythmic, humorous, poetic and improvisational battle traditions. The agonistic dynamics of contests in ashıq culture are represented by the riddles that are asked as an important part of the performance. In meykhana it is represented by the battles about the performers, i.e. who has the smartest, funniest and most up-to-date improvisation.

### 6.3 Games and Meykhana

Meykhana's strong attributes of performance can also be analysed parallel with folkloristic ceremonies and festivities, which are based upon the mythological notion of performance. Within mythical thinking, the events are connected to the spiritual world and spiritual practices. Folk plays, games, performances related to seasonal ceremonies (in Azerbaijani: *mövsüm mərasimləri*) and family folk traditions dating back to ancient times are still popular today, especially in the spring celebrations of *novruz*. (For instance, the plays '*Kosa-kosa*', '*Qaravəlli*'.) Summarizing his thoughts about folk plays, Professor Əfəndiyev shows that the later stages of the development of folk plays are connected to life standards, daily life and elements of comical artistic creativity among other things<sup>96</sup>. These exact features are reflected in meykhana, and quite evidently in my opinion. In folk plays, participants wear various costumes and masks and perform various scenes. These scenes are traditionally complemented with dialogue, and even a little room is given for improvisation. These theatre-like forms of folk literature certainly can be compared to meykhana's performative and entertainment qualities.

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96 Əfəndiyev 1992: 100, 108



## 7. Performances - The Narrative Situation.

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I wish in this chapter to review some of the most obvious contextual preferences, which can help to make better sense of the lyrics. Meykhana is a result of a concrete action, which demands an improvisation from the performer. These are by definition ephemeral. The foundations for its narratology are always different and develop during a performance. The tempo of the rhythm and the melody changes according to the content and mood, which is constantly recreated. The musical mode of the utterance changes its performative features and characteristics, although it has a chant-like personality and minimal tonal melody during the improvisation. The quality of meykhana stimulates deep and effective thoughts. By ‘quality’ here is not meant good quality or bad quality, or the seriousness or unseriousness of the genre. Quality here is measured by its effect. The point is that battles are more effective than they are interesting, because in the battles, from the second opponents meet each other, there is a certain philosophy of conflicts (also conflicting philosophies). It is not staged the same way as in theatres, these are not fictional conflicts as in films or duets, here the process is live action, and natural. What becomes interesting in meykhana, despite its simple language, is how the conflict carries socio-psychological weight, because you witness two opposites in a live act. This conflict develops inside the act and grows, changes and works itself out into the crowd. These acts have different colours depending on the gathering, the audience and themes of the party, wedding, celebration or events of a birthday (it should also be mentioned that meykhanas are not a part of a grieving ceremony like a burial).

### 7.1 Drugs and Alcohol at Weddings and other Gatherings

*Meykhanas actually always been said by gathered people who are drunk and intoxicated. Those people say honest words. They are not so educated. – Fərid*

*Meyxana əslində həmişə içkili nəşəli adamların yığılıb haqq sözü deyən adamlar olub. Onlara haqq sözü dediyi üçün hörmət qoyulub. O gədər də savadlı olmayıblar. –*

Fərid.

*They say that meyxana is an art made by intoxicated people – Hacı Əli*  
*Meyxana meyli adamlarən eledişi sənətidir, deyirlər – Hacı Əli*

*Smoke that marijuana, let its smoke also spread to mountains*  
*Let the sleeping big shepherds in the mountains also wake up.*<sup>97</sup>

*Çək nəşəni qoy tüstüsü dağlara da yayılsun*  
*Dağlarda yatan zırpı çobanlar da oyansun*

The last quotation is from an informant<sup>98</sup> who remembered<sup>99</sup> this double strophe from the end of 1960<sup>th</sup>, a kind of tribute to marijuana. He remembered it while talking of the past and his youth, while he was comparing the scene today to the scene of his youth. The most stereotypical picture of performers concerns their intake of drugs and alcohol. In meyxana there is the phenomenon of gathered men. It could be party, wedding or even a street corner. Consumption of alcohol would not be a surprise. One informant mentions that smoking has been preferable over drinking, due to it having less smell and not being so easily recognized by police and alcohol detectors. These are claims of only one of my informants. However *nəşə* (common word for drugs as hashish, marihuana and opium) is not a taboo in the meyxana environment. Access to marijuana, hashish and opium has recently been more difficult than when it was easily brought into the country from the eastern side of the Caspian Sea (including Turkmenistan and Afghanistan) that is between the 60s and the 80s, according to that same informant. The justification of the consumption of drugs, however, is problematic. Rafiq, another informant, when he answered to the question about how realistic it was to say it was a drug-consuming environment, confirmed my scepticism toward that stereotype.

‘This art comes out from the people. It means it occurs among people and created among them. And among normal people one finds everything: the ones who smoke and the ones who do not, strict Muslims, and you have Muslims who drink. Our people drink. It is a

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<sup>97</sup> Stanza from the interview with Rafiq (03.10.10),

<sup>98</sup> Since marihuana is illegal in Azerbaijan I will rather let the name of informer out.

<sup>99</sup> Generally in the beginning of interviews I asked the informants to provide me with samples of stanzas they remembered, even randomly, during the conversation. The aim was to be able to collect different kind of meykhanas, which I will reproduce in the scope of the thesis.

tradition we have herited from Russians. One has always alcohol on the table. But it is a lie that everybody gets intoxicated. Personally I know performers who have never tasted anything...'<sup>100</sup>

## 7.2 Setting: Sacrifice Me in the Name of Your God. Oh Sea of Golden Sands (*Tanrına qurban a gızıl gum dəniz*)

Səlimov Şağani writes in a newspaper article about meykhana's development during performances and points out that the venue, the mood, the people, and common knowledge is what builds up the meykhana from verse to verse:

‘...The content of the poems is adjusted to the atmosphere in the gathering, the personalities of the participants, their appearance, profession, occupation, art, and also to any movement or behaviour in the crowd, words they say, mimicry, etc., and the last line of each verse, the last word of the each line is made coherent phonetically and logically with the refrain part’<sup>101</sup>

The setting for meykhana's birth was described to me for the first time in the stories of Balasadiq. He has eleven stories about the circumstances under which meykhana emerged and developed. These autobiographical stories, entitled *Sacrifice Me in the Name of Your God, oh Sea of Golden sands (Tanrına qurban a gızıl gum dəniz)*, *A Wedding (Toy)*, *A Valley of Love (Eşq dərəsi)*, *A Case of a Candy Drops (Barbaris məsələsi)*, *A Curse of a Tongue and the Troublesome (Dil bəlası və bəlakeş)*, *I Will Not Stop My Words Even if I am Hanged from the Gallows Tree (Dara çək söz dilimdə galmayacaq)*, *The Rhyme of Memmedali (Məmədəli kişinin qafiyəsi)*, *The Meykhana of a Light (İşığın meyxanası)*, *A "Zurna" of a Bozbash*<sup>102</sup> (*Bozbaşın "zurna"sı*), *A la Meykhana (Meyxanasayağı)* and *Beymemmed Has Always Answers (Beyməmməd kişi*

<sup>100</sup>

*Bu senet xalqın içindən çıxan bir sənətdir, yəni adi camaat arasında deyilir, ünsür olunur, yaranır və normal xalqın içində hamısı olur da. Çəkəni də, çəkməyəni də, tərs müsəlmani də, müsəlman olub içəni də. İndi bizim xalq içəndi. Ruslardan qalma bir adətdi. İçki həmişə var stolda. Amma yalan söhbətdi hamısı nəşələnir. Liçny mənim tanıdığım meyxanaçılar var ki, heç vaxt ağızlarına belə vurmayıblar.*

<sup>101</sup>

*... şeirlərin məzmunu yığıncağın ruhuna, iştirakçıların xasiyyətinə, zahiri aləminə, peşəsinə, sənətinə, məclisdəki hər hansı bir hərəkətinə, sözünə, mimikasına və.s. cəhətlərinə uyğun deyilir və hər bəndin sonuncu misrası, misranın son sözü fonetik, məzmun cəhətdən nəqarət bəndi ilə uyğunlaşdırılır (Səlimov Şağani: ‘Nadiri folklor janrı-meykhana’, 525-ci qəzet, 2008, 5 dekabr, p. 7).*

<sup>102</sup>

A local dish

*söz altında galmır*) are gathered in the book *Abşeron mexhanaları* alongside meykhana poetry. When reading these, one can easily imagine the atmosphere of the gathering where a rhyming improvisation takes place, the place itself and the personal relationships between the performers. I wish to introduce a short sequence of one meykhana story, narrated by Balasadiq in the *Abşeron mexhanaları* book. The verses paint a picture of the atmosphere of the gathering, which is concentrated around both the verses and the act of performing, however not around any political ideology. The verses improvised are kept in the footnote in original language.

I want to talk about one meykhana medjlis I have witnessed. When I say ‘medjlis’ don’t understand that is a wedding or something. These kinds of medjlises mostly were at the seashore. I have heard many improvised, smart and stupid meykhanas performed by youngsters, and middle-aged village men sitting in a circle, knee to knee on the sand, which reminds one of gold grinded as powder. I have been amazed and an enthusiast to one friend’s qafiyes such as

Sacrifice me in the name of your God. Oh Sea of Golden sands  
Oh sea, that trusts the poor and naked <sup>103</sup>

Even now when my way crosses the shore the last lines of the meykhana I just said, gives a pain to my heart.

You, who saved us from this war  
let me die in you, you close my eyes, sea <sup>104</sup>

The boy who performed this double strophe did indeed drown in the sea. Yes, Anyway...

Forty years later I participated again in a similar medjlis, in open air, at the shore of the sea. Five people were sitting in a ring. I did not recognize two of them. It was said that they were from Buzovna and are working at sea. They added, showing a boat, that they have heard about people going to gather here for medjlis and they made their way here through the sea. A lot of people were gathered there. I knew the majority of them. They were regular listeners. The meykhana performers were ready to start. One offered that it is not allowed to have repetitions. That means the two lines said after each meykhana will not be repeated. [It was also said that the] meykhanas should be a double strophe. I understood what it meant. Generally not dependent on how many people are gathered,

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103      Tanrına qurban a qızıl qum dəniz  
Kasıb, lüt üryanlara qəyyum dəniz

104      Sən ki, çıxardın bizi bu davadan  
Səndə ölüm. sən gözümü yum dəniz

generally four line meykhana [stanzas] are said before it is the turn of the next person. In this way, without taking a break and without distorting the rhythm, meykhana continues. While one says these four lines, it gives the next person time to think. But with double strophe meykhana, development is challenged. The challenge is dependent on one's sharpness and word reserve. The rule that 'no repetition' is allowed in the chorus, which was said by a young man, serves the same purpose: whoever dares and has enough courage is welcome, but there will be no time to think.

It was demanded that a qafiye should be suggested. And it came:

Faith of our religion is love  
Let us worship our religion<sup>105</sup>

After that, the person sitting next to him said his double strophes without taking a break

We are people of wise people  
lets us respect meykhana from the bottom of our hearts<sup>106</sup>

Then third

Do not look for mistakes in wine  
rather look for spirit in the wine gathering<sup>107</sup>

Fourth

Let's search for logic with pleasure  
and pay attention to its measure<sup>108</sup>

Fifth

We are people of wise people  
let us respect meykhana from the bottom of our hearts<sup>109</sup>

As can be seen here, the fourth person invited the next to take over by saying 'and pay attention to its measure'

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<sup>105</sup> Dini inamımızdır eşq  
Dinimizə biət edək

<sup>106</sup> Rind əhliylilik meyxañəyə  
Canı dildən hörmət edək

<sup>107</sup> Meydə xəta gəzmə nahaq  
məclis-i meydə ruha bax

<sup>108</sup> Nuş ilə məntiq axtaraq

Ölçüsünə diqqət edək

<sup>109</sup> Rind əhliylilik meyxañəyə  
Canı dildən hörmət edək

Then the line was finished, the first one started again ...

The episode introduces us to a complex perception of love, mentioning ‘faith of our religion is love’ as a reference, in which *love*, namely love of God, love through understanding, stands centrally. The performance by sitting on the sand knee to knee, where the instrument is finger snapping, supports itself to local religious or artistic traditions in which chant-like practices are uttered by religious figures, believers, and believers of other religions than Islam. These parallels can be compared to similar processes occurring between classical music mugam and religion, which Inna Naroditskaya points out (2006: 19-22).

As can be seen also in the verse, ‘Let’s search for logic with pleasure and pay attention to its measure’ the participant makes a meta-narrational formulation, about inviting improvisers to not destroy the metre, the rhythm, or the order of short and long vowels, and at the same time keep meaningfulness. As already mentioned, the act is called *ayag vermek* - an invitation to take over.

### 7.3 Meykhana shows: Television Competition: *De Galsin*

Competitions are organized by the television station ANS TV and recently also by Space TV. Originally starting on ANS, in the programme *De Galsin*, relatively young performers in the genre usually compete with each other. There is a jury that includes well-known meykhana performers and poets. The structure of these competitions can remind one of modern talent shows and competitions. In *De Galsin*, all participants battle against one other, the winners getting through to the last sixteen, then quarter-finals, semi-finals and then at the end two finalists compete. Each battle has three rounds. In the first round, *Tut galdi* (‘catch it, it is coming’), participants improvise around rhymes (*qafiye*) they have chosen themselves. They are usually well-prepared for this. In the second round, *Al galdi* (‘take it, it is coming’), the participants try to catch or match the rhymes of their opponents. The round consists of two parts: first, the two opponents battle around a rhyme that the first participant puts forward, and second, they battle around a rhyme that the second participant puts forward. The third round is named after the competition *De Galsin* (‘say and let it come’). This time the jury suggests a number of rhymes. These rhymes are written on a small piece of paper

which are put into a hat and then members of audience pick the rhymes from the hat. When the rhyme is chosen the battle begins. The jury awards points in a five-point system. In the final round, the winner is decided by text messages and telephone calls that viewers and the audience make. Each artist is assigned an sms and telephone number by the organizers.

Here it should be made clear that the participants themselves participate in the sms sending process, as their friends and relatives are heavily involved, as mentioned by Hacı Əli, Hacı Qəzəlxan and Fərid. The motivations for personal involvement in that process can be compared to the motivation one might have to play the lottery, as was explained to me by Hacı Qəzəlxan. Imagine the following situation: a participant puts in a pot  $n$  manats<sup>110</sup>, which represents what he is willing to spend in that competition. The  $n$  manats is then the amount to be spent on telephone bills or on pre-paid mobile phones. This increases the amount of votes he receives through sms and telephone calls, which is the way a winner is declared. Whoever is willing to put more of their own money in is therefore ultimately more likely to win the competition. The winner's prize is a new car, which cost more than  $n \times 6$  manats. If there are twelve finalists, this will make  $n \times 12$  manats spent by the performers, which will be mainly shared by the Television Company and Telephone Companies. Here one has a chance to win the competition and the car and also get national acknowledgement. Whoever is willing to spend more than  $n$  manats, have however more chances to win. Still, for  $n$  manats one spends it is however possible to gain some sort of publicity and popularity which again will be helpful for future bookings for weddings etc., and business in general. An artist who does not win the competition can still show his talent nationally and will at least end up with some popularity, if nothing else, which hopefully will provide him with future possibilities.

However, since popularity provides some sort of income possibilities after the end of the competition, national acknowledgement is gained lately only through mediated meykhana. One witnesses a gradually growing interest among youngsters to participate in mediated competitions.

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<sup>110</sup> Manat is the name of the Azerbaijanian monetary unit. 1 manat (AZN) roughly equals 7.35 Norwegian kroner (NOK) by today's rate (april 2012).

## 8. The Language of Meykhana

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Generally speaking, Azerbaijan's official language, as with other Soviet republics, was victimized by autocratically dry and official language, devoid of colloquial language and its emotions. The majority of the country is rural and the colloquial language is the language of rural places, with their different dialects. Today the alternative for the traditional public Soviet language has come to be the rural language, or so it seems to me. The gap between the official (also literary) and the rural language in the public sphere has today, in my opinion, become so minimized as to be undetectable. The official language today is filled with simple words, simple speech modes, jargon, dialects and Russian and Turkish words. (Linguistic ideology or reforms following the implementation of the Latin alphabet (officially adopted in 1992) have been absent). This is also detectable in meykhana language. However, the official Soviet language actually had little impact on meykhana language during Soviet rule, since meykhana had little interaction with the official world.

As the main empirical material for this chapter on language and its application, I am using the case study I prepared during my field study in 2009, when I made an interview with Rəşad. The lyrics I have analysed, with the constantly reoccurring line – “The aşiq is playing his/her saz for the sake of money” (*Aşiq çalır sazı pulun xətrinə*). In this statement, the folkloristic ideal art of Ashiq is put to the test, and the author points out the power of money over the local, folkloric and authentic. The text is densely intertextual. It has references to earlier texts, occasions, films and folk songs. Here performers use characters from the classic Azerbaijani film *O Olmasın bu olsun* made in 1956, a popular motion picture adaptation of an operetta composed by Uzeyir Hacıbəyov. Another fictional character used is Fantômas, created by the French writers Marcel Allain (1885–1969) and Pierre Souvestre (1874–1914). The performance has a battle character with more than three practitioners. The lyrics are about injustices in society, cynical focus on financial standing, bribery and how money is more highly valued than human values. The word for money (in Azerbaijani *pul*) is repeated 35 times in 15 verses with an almost chant-like usage, described by



my informant as an ironic twist.

There is not any person left that we like or adore, look up to and make statues. It's money we adore. It is so important that we worship and make statues for it. To say we owe money back to money is the most ironic part. Human life weighs much less than what money does. Therefore it is us who owe money to it. We're the culprits and you can step on us.

To ironize over cynical focus on money is a somehow 'spot-on' approach by the artist and in the video, the audience enjoy it, they are clapping and shouting. The most specific epistemic component of this meykhana is humour, the comic feeling following the understanding of the content of the text (with high personal truth component). While political views and aesthetic tastes are different and personal, the reality they share between them and the audience is common and known. The audience is eager to hear how differently these can be expressed. The factual truth of it is of course irrelevant and also uninteresting to them (also for the researcher).

The relationship of the language of meykhana to its content and to a wide range of features can be inserted into the discussion. Therefore here I will try to separate out the most important linguistic features of the genre, which will also create the grounds for further investigation. The most important linguistic features worth mentioning within the scope of this thesis are the Baku dialect, code-switching, particularly with the Russian language and street jargon.

### 8.1. The Baku Dialect

*Authentic meykhanas should be said in strong Baku dialect – Farid.*

One encounters the use of the Baku dialect throughout all of the performance in the abovementioned case study, starting with the first verse, where the word *xətrinə* ('for the sake of') is said by performer A as *xətrünə*. In the second verse, Performer B rhymes *caymayun*, *yaymayun* and *saymayun*: those are the imperative forms of the verbs 'to explode' or 'to lose a head', 'to spread' and 'to count as', respectively, using the Baku dialect version of the imperative suffix *yIn*, which is *yUn*.

*X Gardaş, bir dayanın caymayun,*

*Menim söhbətimi her tərəfə yaymayun,*

*Gulnazı abırlı fason saymayun,*

*Brother X, wait a second, don't lose your head*

*Do not spread my conversations around*

*Do not count Gulnaz to be a decent one*

Meykhana is a genre that can allow the cultural material of the local dialect to be exaggerated. Among the reasons why meykhana is considered to originate from Baku is that stereotypically, the dialect of Baku, especially in the above-mentioned Mashtaga village, is reckoned to be a main meykhana dialect, and the village is seen as a meykhana's motherland. It is said that if one put a playful rhythm into Baku dialect it would sound just like meykhana. It has even been noted that if one tried to exaggerate Baku dialect humorously, it could be mistaken for meykhana. Paying attention to the majority of pseudonyms that contemporary performers have taken shows a close connection between meykhana and the birthplaces of the performers. They are mainly Baku villages, for example Daqlı, Garaçuxurlu, Xırdalanlı and Kurdexanlı, etc. Place of birth is also a recurring motif in meykhana, that is, the attachment to the place from where one comes. Meykhanas such as *Cottages of Absheron* or *Mashtaga* are good samples of such. Why Mashtaga village takes a prominent position is not actually surprising. Being the biggest village in the Baku district, most of the poets whose pieces have been collected in post-Soviet literature have come from this village. Moreover, a majority of historically well-known meykhana performers who set standards and are mentioned often by other performers have come from this village.

What is interesting to see here is how the Baku dialect suits meykhana and lives up to the expectations created for an utterance with a stamp of 'authenticity'. The Baku dialect is the Azerbaijani dialect with distortion of vowel harmony, for example *getdü* (for standard Azerbaijani *getdi*), *gəldü* (for *gəldi*), *yaxçidü* (for *yaxşıdır*), *gərdeş* (for *gardaş*). My interpretation is that such vowel disharmony seems to create a suitable environment for syllables to be broken into feet of *aruz* and therefore sounds to the ear similar to the mode of classical Persian poetry (vowel harmony is an absent element in the Persian language). Moreover, the heavy dialect of Baku creates a suitable atmosphere which may allow mixing of the round-unrounded, front-back

vowels and this also creates a fertile environment for artificially extended/shortened vowels, so that you get a taste of aruz meter. (As mentioned above, vowel length is not phonemic in Azerbaijani). Then, how it is that this mimicry of Persian poetic traditions is considered to have ‘authenticity’ in meykhana?

## 8.2. Russian Language

In the lyrics analysed, Russian words were used frequently with Azerbaijani suffixes, as we have witnessed to be characteristic for many other meykhanas, too. In the case study in *izdaçlar*, from the Russian *здача* [zda:cha], which corresponds to the English word ‘change’ (i.e. money given in exchange for money in larger units; money returned as the balance of that given in payment), the vowel *i* is used as a prefix before the word. My informant said that he was making fun of his own people by adding the vowel in front. He said the word is aimed at people who cannot speak Russian properly and are still trying. I had to proceed with the interview and did not manage to ask follow-up questions to that, since that particular interview was meant to be only concerning the poem. Such words can be analysed here, however. No word of Turkic origin starts with the letters *n*, *m*, *l*, *r*, *z*, or a consonant cluster; therefore a vowel is put in front if any of the abovementioned initial consonants appear, in accordance with the vowel harmony rules. An example of such a word is *Urus*, normally *Rus*, meaning Russian (both person and adjective). Another example is the word *ruble*, the Russian currency (in Azerbaijani *rubl*), pronounced as *urubul* by many. These are quite common.

This is a very popular meykhana in Russian, known by a number of young boys in Baku area, who sang it for each other. It could be used to make fun of somebody with a good or bad car, or somebody with bad Russian or generally to look down on somebody. This meykhana is said in Russian but in a stereotypical Bakuvian accent.

*U menya jiguli signal italiansky*

*Sam voyenniy, a forma grajdansky*

*I have a Jiguli but its signal horn is from Italy*

*I am in the military but my uniform is civilian*

This is easily understood as: I have a Soviet car but my horn is Italian, I work for the government but I am not a supporter of it. The author is saying that one should not judge by appearances, by describing typical Baku life, showing the antithesis to the obligations of Soviet life (having a Lada car Jiguli model (in Russian: Жигули) and being a military in Soviet Army) in the first parts of the strophes, but preferring an Italian honk (not being ideologically communist) and being an ordinary citizen in the second parts of the strophes. The use of Russian words and extensions has left traces, especially in speech, as a legacy of Russian as an official language. The Russian words occur also in pre- and early Soviet literature, which is written in Arabic script. E.g., in appendix 1, page 12 we witness the Russian word for *queue*, *очередь* with Azerbaijani lokativ ending *-dA*, transliterated as *Oçiretdə* meaning *in the queue*. However, sometimes the Azerbaijani equivalent to these words can be hard to find on the spur of the moment. One informant's description was, 'All must match, rhyme, meaning as well as logic. If the Russian word matches better, it can be welcomed.'

### 8.3 Street Jargon

The use of dialect, the use of Russian words with their Azerbaijani rules of formation, the features of aruz metre and the construction of personal onomatopoeic combinations change the capacity for the different meanings of the words and enrich them with different 'extensions'. However, seeking to connect general rules of grammar to any specific pattern of how such words are formed gives no reason to epitomize rules, though mainly the formation of the new words can be spontaneous, personal and ephemeral. However meyxana is a genre allowing usage of jargon in much higher level than other local genres and traditions. Reasons for that fact could be that the battle character of the genre invite participants to use the language in more creative ways, and at the same time youngsters have a desire to show their skills through the only tool they possess in these encounters, namely the language. I have searched for the most used words of jargon, which I wish to focus on here.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> I am very grateful to Fərid who provided me with many of these words and has also explained to me the meaning of them.

*Dayday* – uncle (from the word *dayı*). An uncle can also mean here somebody who can help one if one has problems.

*Gərgeş* (also *qaqaş*) – brother, not necessarily biological but corresponds to the English colloquialism ‘bro’.

*Xod getmək*, from the Russian word ходить [*khodit*] – to go. A literal translation is ‘to go the walk’. It means to be tough, to bluff and also to be offensive (e.g. *xoddadu* – somebody is offensive). In the text it is translated as *to go high-speed*

*Razborka* – from the Russian verb разбираться [*razbiratsya*] – to deal, to solve. *Razborka* is a noun, which means a conflict, also a fight.

*Neşe* – marijuana, opium or hashish.

*Fırıldağ* – a lie.

*Nöş* – why

*Garadskoy* – urban. From the Russian word for city, город [*gorod*].

*Cındır* – a person without aesthetic taste.

*Selenni* – villager, from the Russian word for village, село [*selo*].

*Gatıglamag* – the artificial verb made from the noun for yoghurt, which is *qatıq*. This means ‘to talk rubbish’. It corresponds to verbs indicating the utterance of nonsense in English (‘to blather’).

*Çuşka* – most probably from the Russian чушка [*chushka*]. Translated literally it is a new born piglet. The meaning corresponds to the English concept of a ‘hillbilly’.

*Çuşka-muşka* – onomatopoetic and diminutive combination, corresponding to *çuşka*, above.

*Krısı* – from the Russian word for rat, крыса [*krisa*], meaning a miser, someone who would not spend money if they could help it.

*Daş-baş* – jewellery (*daş* – stone; *baş* – head).

*Farmazon* – a fashionable person who cares for trends.

*Bambılı* (or *bambulu*) – an onomatopoetic word. A person without pride or honour.

*Malımatan* – an onomatopoetic word, usually applied to women and girls but could also be applied to men. The meaning is close to *bambili*.

*Xuligan* (also *xuligən*) – from the word for hooligan, meaning a criminal man or a rebellious boy or man; also a boy who does not listen to his parents.

## 9. Content

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*Again the wound on my chest will make me talk*

*I will tell the truth even if they hang me from the gallows tree*

*Yenə dilləndirəcək sinəmdəki yara məni*

*Sözün düzün deyəcəm, çəksələr də dara məni*<sup>112</sup>

While poetry when it was forbidden had more countercultural motifs and nationalism, modern lyrics has disparaging talk, personal denigration, as it is called in the hip-hop scene, the act of ‘*dissing each other*’. However, what are common for all the periods that have been analysed are their provincialism and the realities of Baku.

Meykhana before the media’s modern discovery of it as a business idea played a role of a news-channelling tool, as explained by Hacı Qəzəlxan. Performers in constant contact with people in different villages reproduced the stories of events combined with their own personal stories. Performers travel and are often among people. They are informed and have gathered up deviant views about on-going daily events and narrate them with their own personal touch. Meykhanas are highly contemporary. Their content makes only sense when it has something to do with ongoing local event, issues, debates, generally what occupies people then and there in that particular time and place when meykhana is performed.

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<sup>112</sup>

İmaməliyev 1993: 109

## 9.1 Motifs and subjects

The basic motifs of meykhana are colourful, different and usually quite easily recognizable, such as the themes of praise, recital, narrative and complaint (in Azerbaijani: *tərif*, *vəsf*, *rəvayət*, and *şikayətnamə* respectively).

### Example of praise meykhana (In Azerbaijani: Tərif)

*Such a great car is this baby zil*<sup>113</sup>

*It is not passed by any Volga*<sup>114</sup>

*Əcəb maşındı bu il bala*

*Volgadan galmir dala*

### Example to complaint (In Azerbaijani: Şikayətnamə)

*It is vain that you created me, God*

*I have to die, to finish, so I do not stay vagabond*

*I have fallen, what should I do God, I have no pillar*

*Kill me, take my life, extinguish my light,*

*Take me to the grave*

*It is a vain you have created me God*<sup>115</sup>

*Nahaq yaratdın meni pərvərdigarə*

*Ölüm qurtarım qalmayım avarə*

*Yıxıldım neyniyim Allah, yoxdur dayağım*

*Öldür al canımı, söndür çırağım*

*Bir dəfə apar goy meni məzarə*

*nahaq yaratdın məni pərvərdigarə*

The repertoire of performers consist of the themes of locally meaningful subjects, daily events, social phenomena, and are densely intertextual with references to Islam, the Qur'an, native epic heroes such as Babək, Koroğlu, social relations, conflicts and

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<sup>113</sup> See footnote 51

<sup>114</sup> Sung by Hacı Əli, transcript of the interview dating to 16.10.11

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

wars, often conflict with Armenia about the region of Nagorno Karabakh, immigration and emigration. The stories of meykhana are usually concrete, they tell the story from a particular place of particular time. Usually they mention the hometown and on-going daily events and performer's point of view of those. They are dominated by humour, sarcasm, and irony and are usually critical and moralising.

## 9.2 Mode of Utterances

Devices of linguistic utterance such as syntactic and stylistic figures employed as figurative, allegorical and metaphorical agents create colourful opportunities. In literary language, stylistic devices (antitheses, repetitions, syntactic parallelism, literary oration) contribute to the generation and conception of different figurative tinctures. When a meykhana performer uses different figures of speech, he stimulates and boosts his expressions and the strength of the language and creates extra room for intonational and syntactic elements. The structure of the poetic discourse of meykhana, and the use of figures and metaphors not only enriches and decorates the utterance but also reflects the characteristic properties of language. In narrative meykhana, its epic character is exaggerated, as if structural deformation takes place, and figurative or rhetorical speech strengthens the emotional impact of the poetic language. Of course, figurative speech as a poetic device is not an accidental event. Local classical poetry had been using different figures of speech widely.

Pay attention to the verses below by Əliağa Vahid.

*Cupbearer, this is not the only fun with the cup  
The delight of meykhana comes after that  
We should drink the flower of the cup as doctors would do  
We would not destroy the harmony of the meykhana  
We should kiss the feet of the masters of meykhana  
Maybe we could see the reflection of the beloved inside of the soul  
Let's get ecstatic by the pleasure, oh all wise men  
Let them be dazzled by the insanity of our language*

*Sakiya, bir bu deyil nəşəsi peymanəmizin,  
Hələ bundan sonradır ləzzəti meyxanəmizin*



*Biz gərək badeyi-gülgünü həkimanə içək,  
 Pozmayaq rövqətini məclisi-məstanəmizin  
 Ayağın öpməliyik xadımı meyxanələrin  
 Bəlkə, can içrə görək əksini cananəmizin  
 Zülf şövqüylə olaq məst, bütün aqillər,  
 Qalsın idrakına heyran dil-divanəmizin*<sup>116</sup>

The *saki* (from the Arabic root *saka* ‘to pour’) is the servant who pours wine in Sufi (Tassavvuf) philosophy at the medjlis, often held in the garden where the gathered group drink wine, eat delicious food, listen to music, recite poetry, and engage in conversation. This epicene young person is also potentially (or actually) beloved and is often addressed as such in the love lyrics. In the mystical poetry this beloved is a master, who pours out the intoxicating wine of divine love, which causes the adept to let go of reason and turn to the unreasoning logic of the heart (Andrews & Black & Kalpakli 1997: 163).

When Vahid refers to the saqi by addressing *Saqiya* as a first word<sup>117</sup>, it does not only serve to accomplish the rhythmic template of the poem, but it brings a nuance, expressiveness and emotionality to the poetic speech. Vahid in his meykhanas uses an imperative practice (in Azerbaijani: *xitab*), which I understand as a device for illustrating emotions, the mood of the persona created and the inner feelings of the author himself. Other modes of address in Vahid’s ghazels and meykhanas in this practice are *Gözəlīm*, *Könül*, *Dəli könlüm*, *Canan*, *Ey gül*, *Ey dil*, *Sevgilim*, *Ey qara gözlü*, et. al. (my beautiful, heart, my crazy heart, soul, hey flower, hey heart, my love, hey my black-eyed, respectively). These put the reader onto the right pragmatic level for comprehension of the poetic text. Vahid is also an extensive user of redifs (cf. 4.2 above), which accompany the rhyme of the poem and strengthen the poetic accent.

Another intertextual device Vahid successfully uses is idioms, here as a part of a redif. For example:

*If there were thousands of beauties in the nation  
 There would be nobody in creation like you.*

<sup>116</sup> Vahid 1989:162

<sup>117</sup> The ending –a is a Persian vocative marker.

*What I have been going through by your sorrow,  
I would tell only you if I could just reach you  
In a conversation with you.  
Do not let the rival enjoy him/herself close to you  
There is no place for a traitor in paradise<sup>118</sup>*

*Minlərcə gözəl olsada **millət içində**,  
Olmaz sənə bənzər **xilqət içində**,  
Hicrində nələr çəkdiyimi, vəslinə yetsəm,  
Bi-bir sənə arz eyləmə **söhbət içində**,  
Kuyində səfa çəkməyə yol vermə rəqibə,  
Yoxdur yeri xain adamın **cənnət icində**.*

One can also witness to refined interplay between the realistic relationship to the objects and symbolic part of the poem

*The one who is a poet, his words should be true  
The meaning of each of his words should be metaphorical  
the qafiye of his poem should strictly be aruz  
In that case give him the wedding venue  
let's sit knee to knee, I will say the meyghanas  
dont forget this words, gather the pearls.<sup>119</sup>*

*Şair olanın gərək sözləri dümdüz olsun  
Deydiyi hər bir sözün mənası möcüz olsun  
Şeirinin qafiyəsi mütləqə Əruz olsun  
Vərginən bu şairə onda sən toyxanəni  
Gəl oturub diz-dizə, mən deyim meyhanəni  
Unutma bu sözləri, yığginən dürdanəni*

### 9.3 The General Content of the Analysed Literature

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<sup>118</sup> Vahid 1989: 34  
<sup>119</sup> Ibid: 5

Seven books (the first projects in which the genre's name as meyxana can be found) of meyxana lyrics were introduced to the reader at the beginning of the twentieth century, more precisely between 1919 and 1930. Seven of those are in Arabic letters, one published in 1930 is in Latin script. There are two books, both published in 1993, which are in the Cyrillic alphabet. All existing literature gives a big room for colloquial expressions. As also seen from the transcriptions a little attention is paid to consistency of names and book titles, e.g. three forms is used for the same author: Anatollu Əhməd (1925), Əhməd Anatolli (1927) and Əhməd Anadolli (1930). Little consistency is also a case in the poetry introduced in all books.

These books are:

1919 Hal hazırda dair MEYXANƏ (1-ci hissə) Abbas Mirzə Şərifzadə

1919 Hal-hazırda dair MEYXANA (2-ci hissə) Əbbas Mirzə Şərifov və Rza Dərbəli,

1922 MEYXANƏ, Əli Ağsa "Vahid" , Bağır Cabarzadə

1925 Satiragit Tjatroşunda deyilmiş Vahidin Meyxənələri

1925 Qupletlər, Anatollu Əhməd

1927 QUPLETLƏR, Bağır Cabarzadə

1927 "ŞAPALAQ" Əhməd Anatolli

1930 ÇUVALDUZ, ƏHMƏD ANADOLLU

1993 *Oturmuşam samovardan yuxarı* by Balasadiq

1993 *Abşeron meyxanaları* by İmamaliyev Azersoylu Rəhiməğa

### 9.3.1 Pre- and early Soviet literature

As can be seen from the above list, here are two books with the name *Hal hazırda dair MEYXANƏ* (*Meyxanas about the present time*). The first was published 20 May 1919

and the second volume was published on 20 October 1919. All written meykhanas published in these books are poetic battles between Əli İslam and Mirpaşa. In the first book, four written meykhanas are presented to the reader: '*Görürəm*' ('I see'), '*Hara çıxdı getdi*' ('Where did it go'), '*Bizim oldu*' ('It became ours'), and '*Ata və oğul*' ('Father and Son'). '*Görürəm*' consists of ten verses (five by Əli İslam and five by Mirpaşa), '*Hara çıxdı getdi*' is 15 verses (8-7 respectively), '*Bizim oldu*' is 9 verses (5-4) and '*Ata və oğul*' is 7 verses (4-3). The book *Abşeron meyxanaları*, 1993, included some meykhanas of the second volume of this book such as '*Bax*', '*Nə vecimə*', '*Çal*' and '*Bacara bilməzsən*', and includes short information about Əli İslam and Mirpaşa.

These meykhanas are poetic reflections of the people's internal humour, emotions, thoughts and feelings, which also carries an ideological weight. It presents the socio-political life, processes and real events and political figures of its time and also tells concrete (hi)stories. For understanding the text fully, it is useful to have historical knowledge of the relevant era of 1919. Thus, for example '*Bacara bilmə sən*' is concerned mainly with the Russian army, the text using the names of the public figures of its time and referring to the Azerbaijanian relationship to Iran, Russia and Turkey. The text with its informative character paints for one a colourful picture of an idea about economical, social, public, political, cultural and moral life. It also carries individual messages, standpoints and the reactions of improvisers.

For many meykhanas I have read, one of common characteristics is that they are usually descriptions of one or many parallel events taking a place within a specific time. They are densely intertextual, where historical heroes and events are described as a part of ongoing social issues. After comparing the meykhanas written one hundred years ago with those written now, both appear to give an impression of being relevant, up to date, and always contemporary.

Also the same structural and contextual frames are set for the book by the name of *Əli Ağə Vahid və Bağır Cabbarzadə, MEYXANƏ, 1922*. The year of the Islamic calendar 1338 is also included. This book also tells a story of local realities: bribery, inflation, prices for eggs, bread, meat, potato and gas among other things. As with the previous two works, the normative personal statements of performers follow the reader throughout the book. The words and the sounds have been kept as they were printed and will follow in the appendix. No changes in the transliteration of the work were

done from the original script including lexicon, lexographics, stylistic or punctuation. These three books together with the *Satiragit Tjatosunda deyilmiş Vahidin Meyxənaləri* (*Vahid's meykhanas said in the Satiragit theatre*) should be considered as the first pioneering steps in the direction of gathering poetic examples of the meykhana genre.

*Satiragit Tjatosunda deyilmiş Vahidin Meyxənaləri*, 1925, is different from the previous works in its structure, composition, idea and content. This book describes how events are staged on a theatre scene, the performers and their poetic stanzas. Here one witnesses meykhana's interaction with theatre art. The meykhanas collected in this book are a part of a play with more than two artists, and scenographic elements are also described, which is not usual in other books. The story tells us that there are paintings of a worker, a villager, a shop owner, religious figure molla, a bourgeois, a lord and military leader on the curtains (in Azerbaijani: *fəhlə, kəndçi, baqqal, molla, burjuj, beg* and *xan*, respectively). Parts of curtain where the head and hands are placed are cut out so that one can see the performer's head and hands; the performer standing behind the curtain. The meykhana act is built around the conversations between these personas. The bourgeois and the molla on one side argue with the worker and the rest. These classifications describe for us the social realities of the upper (financial, religious elite, represented by bourgeois and molla), worker and middle classes (worker, shop owner, villager). Authors also describe the play, music and melodies.

### 9.3.2 Abşeron meyxanaları (1993) and Oturmuşam Səmovardan Yuxarı (1993)

Some of the meykhanas from books published between 1919 and 1925 were reproduced in the book *Abşeron meyxanaları*. Comparing them, one can easily see some falsifications and discrepancies. The editors provide some information about Əliğa Vahid and note him to be a ghazel poet primarily and a master of meykhana and bedihe. The authors of *Abşeron meyxanaları* attract the readers' attention to the meritorious periods of the genre's life, and emphasize the origin of the motives of certain meykhanas. Thus, when the authors spend some pages on Mirzə Bağır's (1810-1882) meykhanas, it is mentioned that when Mirzə Bağır was 18 years old he had composed social-political bedihes connected to the division of Azerbaijan.

Meykhanas gathered in this book carry strong messages. The content is highly critical and aggressively nationalistic.

Although the 1993 books were published in the post-Soviet era, the publishers have chosen meykhanas also from the pre-Soviet epoch: some of the poetry included here are by Ata Baba Hicri (Atoppa) (1863-1922), Bəyəmməd Şağani (1880s<sup>120</sup>-1944), Əliğa Vahid (1895-1965), Balaqardaş,<sup>121</sup> Ağahüseyn, Mirzə Cavad (1908-1974), Soltan Nəcəfov (1911-1981), Mirpaşa və Əli İslam and Məmmədəli Məsəddiq (1922-1997).

To me it is beyond doubt that the editors have spent a great amount of effort in the search and collection of the abovementioned source material. According to Nizami Tagisoy, these books have played a great role in invoking a positive attitude towards meykhana after the 1990s.<sup>122</sup> A reader becomes aware of how performances are staged, and at the same time one is introduced to various different personal styles.

Today Meykhana has created new circumstances around its performance, which is easily synthesized with other genres. If the meykhanas at the beginning of the twentieth century were performed in the theatre stages between acts of a play or as part of a play, today meykhana has gained the position of being recognized as a popular musical genre, and the visible part of the genre finds place generally in Television programs and shows, studios, weddings and other kinds of gatherings.

## 10. Modern Meykhana

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### 10.1 Mediated life of Meykhana

Within a post-communist transformation as mentioned above, cultures react, reinvent and adapt the dominant culture and common memories in their own national projects and apply it. Here as also with other local and national projects, meykhana failed to target ideology. By that is meant that although artistic self-awareness plays an

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<sup>120</sup> The correct date is unknown.

<sup>121</sup> Dates of birth and death of some poets were not inserted in the books.

<sup>122</sup> Transcript of the interview Nizami Tagisoy: 25.10.11

important role, most meanings emerge in the hands of non-artists, in this case the national media and industry (here industry connected to meykhana). What is common today for the Azerbaijani *mugam*, *ashiq* and *meykhana* genres in the post-Soviet period, is that they have all been suddenly exposed to popular mediation, and are the new products of modern capitalism, since the country is challenged by the fact that the new capitalism is a new tradition for all branches of society: artists, industry, media and government. However, the recent development of being thrown under the national spotlight is not necessarily a negative development for the practitioners of meykhana, although many, including my scholar informants, consider it to be a negative turning point. Industry designs meykhana products: Television and radio shows, competitions, advertisements, ring-tones for sms and telephone calls, CDs, etc. This arena takes advantage of a situation and creates a congenial environment for those who are willing to have a public face by establishing shows and giving interviews. Generally the performers are invited to take on a public face. Already existing knowledge of meykhana is recycled in commercial meykhana, and that knowledge is re-used in the strategies of the open market, which is dependent on what modern life demands. Undoubtedly, what is over-exposed, stereotypical and common knowledge about meykhana, such as the notion of the non-educated practitioner or the declamatory and belittling battles, takes attention away from the other functions of meykhana, such as, among other things, an informative rhyming debate. Today in battles broadcast on TV and radio, the performers accentuate mostly the entertaining qualities of the genre and mainly focus on subjects like disrespecting each other's possessions, choices, artistic personalities, etc. while putting themselves in a better light. To quote Fərid,

‘...They are supposed to make entertainment. To make the taste of it sweeter, to make a show, they say anything to each other's faces and criticize each other. One says, “You are not a man,” the other says, “No, *you* are not.” The other says, “I have such a car”... “You have no education.” The other says, “*You* have no education.”’<sup>123</sup>

Nevertheless, the interaction between the ‘underground’ and celebrity worlds is neither a new phenomenon, nor a pioneering act, as informants pointed out. Two

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‘...məcburdular axı burda əyləncə eləməyə. Şirin çıxsın deyə dadı onda ki, üzünə çırpa hər şeyi, shoü şou eləməyə, bir birlərini təngid eləməyə. Bu deyir “sən kişi deyilsən”. bu deyir “sən deyilsən”. O biri “deyir mənə məşinin belə”... “Savadın yoxdu”. Bu deyir sənə yoxdu.’

informants who have lately become popular faces in popular, mediated meykhana compared the art of meykhana to Soviet-era counterculture and compared themselves to popular Soviet artists like Victor Tsoi and Vladimir Vysotsky. What is comparable is how underground resistance voices gain new faces for themselves by being allowed to become popular, public artists. The Tsoi and Vysotsky metaphors create an analogue between censorship in the modern regime and Soviet-era censorship. It implies that being visible and available to a mainstream, and not an underground, audience is connected with control by the authorities. Whether this is a realization of the democratic process where the government (or a political party) is forced to accept the existence of a culture, or a strategic authoritative act, is unknown by me. However, censorship and self-censorship and their legacies are outside the scope of this thesis. The importance of mentioning the strong comparison made by the informants, however, can create the grounds for further investigation into how modern metaphors are created. These kinds of observations can create objectives for further projects to investigate the communist past and revise, remember, and recreate it.

*I also did not listen to mother and father once upon a time  
 The trouble found me, put me into the house of sorrows  
 At least you take a lesson, do not pay attention to wine and meykhana,  
 It would not be a sin to do the opposite, become religious  
 If you want to exist in this world,  
 You have to be blind, you have to be numb, you have to be deaf.*

*Bir zaman mən də qulaq asmadım ata anaya  
 Başıma gəldi bəla saldı məni qəmxanaya  
 bari sən ibret elə baxma meyə meyxanaya  
 gunah olmazki gedib əksinə dindar olasan  
 isteyirsənki bu alemde əgər var olasan  
 sən gərək kor olasan, lal olasan, kar olasan.  
 (Məşədi Baba)<sup>124</sup>*

These are lines from Məşədi Baba, who committed suicide, setting fire to himself in

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<sup>124</sup> 10.01.2011. <http://meyxana.net/forum/showthread.php?t=10112&page=10>



front of his house on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2011.<sup>125</sup> The author, who often took part in battles or performed solo meyxana in a number of private video clips that have been shared on different web pages, is highly respected for his texts. Four meyxanas by him were published in books published in 1993. Two were in the form of battles, in which he is one of the participants. Those are '*Meyxanada satmasam olmaz seni*', which I have translated as 'I Have No Choice Other Than to Sell You in Meykhana', from which some stanzas are used in chapter 5, and '*Hər kəsən öz papağın bərk saxlasun*', 'Everybody, Hold Your Hats Tight', (Balasadiq 1993:236-143, 272-175). The other two pieces in the same book are solo: '*Var*' (meaning 'Have' or 'It Is Possessed With') and '*Abşeron*', (the toponym *Absheron*) (Imaməliyev 1993: 192, 193), included with some brief information about the author.

Listening to his modern meyxanas, his personal standing can be clearly seen. The stanza above painted for me a picture of meyxana scene, i.e. the common realities that both the participants and the audience share. Paying attention to the content, we see constant dissatisfaction, and a direct criticism of society, described in a melancholic way. Məşədi Baba was considered to be an oppositional poet by listeners and was in online forums approached by contributors as one of the last members of an 'authentic' meyxana generation. In the forum discussions it was asked, 'Why did you (or why did you have to) distance us even more from the authentic meyxana?' (*Meshedi Baba, sen niye bizi əsl meyxanadan biraz da uzaqlasdirdin?*)<sup>126</sup>. This question was written by a user only a few months ago someone who praises Məşədi Baba for being a performer of authentic meyxana and who thinks that his death distances listeners from it even more. There are other opinions in the forum, speculations and discussions about his sudden death. Some say he was tired of struggling through life, others say he had an overdose of drugs and alcohol, a common stereotype of meyxana performers that has coloured the general public image of them. This view of the performers is embraced at a national level and reinforces the reasons for meyxana's negative associations. In Məşədi Baba's case some commentators would also decry the characterization of Məşədi Baba in this stereotypical way (even though it is true that there are video clips of him consuming

<sup>125</sup> 10.01.2011 <http://www.big.az/index.php?sid=18747>

<sup>126</sup> 10.01.2011 Clip named *Meyxana ustadi Mesedibaba vefat edib*:  
<http://meyxana.net/forum/archive/index.php/t-10112.html?s=0b4fd8bffc5a63cc42414295c52295fb>

alcohol<sup>127</sup>).

In the stanza quoted above, the words meykhana involve ambiguity. As mentioned before, meykhana with the meaning of wine house or pub does not exist in Azerbaijani, so one could not interpret meykhana as a tavern, winery or pub. The term is only used in connected with the genre. 'Mey', on the other hand, is ambiguous. It could mean alcohol (in the sense that Məşədi Baba asks listeners to take a lesson from his mistakes and stay away from alcohol) or it could mean the genre itself if we consider the words *meyə meyxanaya* as a unit. Meyə meyxanaya creates interplay with words in a playful (deliberately ambiguous) rhyming way. Although that line is playful, it is nevertheless serious. Close your eyes to the word mey, and meykhana could refer to the modern genre, meaning to not pay attention to the overexposure of the genre that the debates have created, such as the meykhana-bedihe debate, and also the media coverage of it. If this is the case, then it also indirectly means to stick to the truth, to authenticity, to 'us' and to opposition. The artist is also asking the listener not to pay attention to this genre of which he himself is an active member. Whatever the interpretation, he reveals his despair and asks his listeners not to follow his path. The line 'it would not be a sin to become religious' propagates religious thinking in modern Azerbaijan. Məşədi Baba here invites listeners into the Islamic world. Nevertheless his religious standing is debatable, since he has done things that obviously contradict Islam. Among other things, committing suicide is seen as the biggest Islamic sin locally, where even Mollas and other religious figures declined to come to his last blessing. Also, assuming that he was drinking alcohol, it shows his weak understanding of what he is promoting, which also could exactly be his point: He knows his path is the wrong one and does not recommend it to others?

Approaching culture from a religious perspective offers few challenges, since both Islam and Westernisation both propagated it parallel to one another. The Azerbaijani cultural objective after the dissolution of the Soviet Union has been to westernize all visible national projects, including mediated and unmediated local customs and traditions, with Turkey held up as an ideal for the secular Muslim nation state. Today one witnesses traces of this in popular television programmes such as *Heyat tərzi* ('Lifestyle') and *Avropa* ('Europe'). Even the new visa system in the country

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<sup>127</sup>

Clip named *Resad Mesedi Baba*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tE9RKvqJxfg>

implemented from October 2010 was debated by the minister of domestic affairs as an act to make the system resemble European systems. Two of my informants are Hajji. Having pilgrimaged at least once to Mecca confers social status and is somehow expected in some environments in the Baku suburbs. Both Hacı Əli and Hacı Qəzəlxan introduced themselves with this title and considered themselves to be devoted Muslims. In modern life religious opinions convey to influence, and are dynamic and heterogeneous. They are the result of traditions, history, collectiveness and needs. Taking my fieldwork into consideration, it is possible to make an assumption that religious awareness and positioning should not necessarily be measured by indigenous religious beliefs and sacred practices in modern Azerbaijan, but mostly by guises of the past and hopes for the future by re-creating obligations and belongings using false images of Sufism (Tasavvuf). One can visit Mecca and gain the title Hajji in front of one's name, but also never practice the religion (in the modern sense of utterance: by praying, fasting etc). One can claim to be a Sufi but not have knowledge of what Sufism stands for. Most surprising for me was young people calling themselves devoted Muslims but not knowing which branch of Islam they belonged to: Sunni, Shiite, Wahhabi or any other. The answers of my informants tended to be evasive when some questions of history or religion were raised. Following the field trip, my questions and eager e-mails concerning religious references yielded only rhetoric or abstract answers. Azerbaijan had no freedom of religious practise until recently, after the fall of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless some traditions have survived and reshaped themselves. The country has different holidays and occasions than those celebrated in the Soviet era, e.g. events of the Muslim calendar such as *Ramazān* (in Arabic: *Ramaḍān*, the Islamic month of fasting) and *Gurban bayramı* (in Arabic: *Īd al-Adha*, the 'Feast of the Sacrifice') are celebrated publically. Large, beautiful mosques, religious organizations and governmental initiatives to encourage pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca were unknown practices for the last Soviet generation.

The lines 'If you want to exist in this world, you have to be blind, you have to be numb, you have to be deaf' refer to the imbalance between what is expected of one and what one is and wishes to be. It refers also to censorship. That my informants live with limited freedom to speak is clearly communicated: both at the artistic level, in terms of what is expected of them to improvise about (or not to improvise about), also

what artists have more of a chance of success and what do not, depending on their lyrics, poetry, texts, interviews, conversations and general everyday life. The article in the newspaper *Meyxana Qazeti*, entitled "*ŞOK ŞOK, ŞOK! Hamımızın qafiyələrdən əvvəlcədən xəberimiz olurdu*" (*SHOK SHOK SHOK! We all knew qafiyəs beforehand*)<sup>128</sup>, concerning TV shows, is illustrating, as it deals with messages being given to the meykhana performers on beforehand about what subjects should not be touched upon, and also rhymes and refrains which are going to be the basis for the improvisations being given so long time on beforehand that the performers can prepare themselves very thoroughly. Undoubtedly this very fact has consequences for all aspects of improvisation, and a new term has emerged, the so-called 'show meykhana'. Which term is used depends on whom the texts are created for. The meykhana audience is young boys, guests of the groom at a wedding or guests at the food medjlises when they invite each other to dinner. The texts of show meykhana are written (or improvised) to satisfy a need created by the polished and decorated world of the media. At the same time, there exists a double standard of disliking show meykhana while being active in it, where purely financial advantage seems to be the imperative. My conversations with the performers also indicate that meykhana is not an appreciated art form even by the performers themselves. To quote Hacı Əli, 'If I had money I would not perform meykhana' (*Menim pulum olsaydı meyxana deməzdim*). Double standards seem to exist where performers today express a dislike for the oppositional character of meykhana, claiming not to have any political point of views and generally not to be interested in politics but at the same time give the oppositional character of the genre as a reason for their own personal interest in being a poet of improvisation. Some informers express also being a supporter of the free speech by saying 'Meykhanas speak a *words of fairness*'.

Talking of two different meykhana 'schools' (show and authentic), informants revealed their disappointment in the genre's recent development and praised the level of free speech in their childhood and youth, with the genre as a medium in which words of fairness (*haqq sözü*) were said. Performers used to be treated as heroes. They could engage in 'combat' about subjects people would not feel comfortable to talk about otherwise. One informant was reminded of Nizami Rəmzi's meykhana he had

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<sup>128</sup> Meyxana Qazeti, Nr 17, 26 avqust-01 sentyabr, 1009. "*Şok! Şok! Şok! "Hamimizin qafiyələrdən əvvəlcədən xəbərimiz olurdu."* Oqtay Kamil. Page: 8-9.

on cassette, in which the author clearly was condemning President Vezirov for the 20<sup>th</sup> of January<sup>129</sup> event, which today would be impossible to do. The stanzas lived on through the cassettes of meykhana recordings, which were exchanged between people during the late Soviet period, and listeners also narrate their stories and interpretations about them. Quite a few verses were remembered and lived on. All of my informants have strong political opinions, even in conversations of a non-political character. In some occasions, putting the recorder on the table alarmed some informants even if my wish to use recordings was clearly communicated either by e-mail or telephone. One of the informants said that as long as I do not ask any political questions and do not get him into trouble, then it could be recorded. Although I accordingly wanted to put the recorder away, in order to make informant to feel safe, he nevertheless insisted on having it on. Before each interview I informed the informers that the interview would only be about the art of meykhana and poetics. I also informed them that anonymity was clearly protected, in addition that the recording would not be used if the informant did not wish it, and in addition that if recorder was being used, the content would be deleted as soon as it is transcribed. That was how I started each interview. But to my surprise, as much as I tried to avoid oppositional and political direction in the questions, informants themselves gave a strong critique of government and had political narratives. This is evident in the part of one interview attached to the thesis (cf. appendix 2).

## 10.2. The Revival of Meykhana in Modern Azerbaijan and its Low Status

Concerning the media's position characteristic for the Azerbaijani context one can surely posit the same as for the most of the world, namely that it seems to be confuse without any certain ideology or direction. Here should be mentioned the media's role in terms of being not a transmitter of meaning, but a part of the process where meaning emerges. Competitions organized over many years on national television stations created a congenial environment for meykhana's revival. The interests of both

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<sup>129</sup> Also known as Black January 20<sup>th</sup> 1991. A violent crackdown on the independence movement during the dissolution of the Soviet Union, where more than 130 people died. (Source: wikipedia)

parties – the performers and the industry<sup>130</sup> – have contributed to the evolution of the genre. By taking part in a commercialized scene, performers become popular and are booked to perform at weddings, which provide them with a more stable income than they would have otherwise, and that is one of the main motivations for the artists. The involvement in the professional meykhana scene organized by enterprises covers among other things the financial needs of the participants. To make one's income from sales of CDs or the like is an almost non-existent prospect because of absent copyright and anti-piracy structures. Originals and pirate copies of the same physical CDs sit next to each other in the same shops, with their respective price differences. Digital formats of the songs are easily available from the net forums. In a place where the monthly salary of a university professor is 270 manats, (approximately 1214 NOK at today's rate), is really not such a stupid idea to try to get popular on television, as one informant, who is a scholar, mentioned to me. The meykhana scene, being considerably bigger today than it was ten years ago, has also created competition. Meykhana has developed, from 'hobby medjlises' in small village weddings in Baku, into a profession on the open market. Becoming a popular face through the national media, in addition to the economic advantages of being booked for weddings, has also created a fertile environment for other acts in the business, including acts from outside the meykhana genre. Mentioned by Hacı Əli one meykhana performer managed to start a small-scale bakery after getting locally popular as a meykhana performer.

It has been pointed out by all my informants and it is easy to see, that meykhana is not greatly appreciated by the economic and cultural elites. This is understandable, considering the fact that meykhana performers have traditionally been seen as uneducated. Yet the performers are highly informed at street level. They are youngsters from the Baku suburbs, hanging out on street corners and 'rapping', informed because they are among crowds of people most of the time and gather local news and views from them, and take these narratives with them to the next place they go.

'In the gathering, men wearing ties (*qalstuklu adamlar*) and do not want to be entertained by warm-blooded young battlers, especially if it is meykhana' – Hacı Əli.

Meykhana's low status is apparent in all sections of society, whether academic,

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By industry here is meant all relating industries: music industry, media industry and television industry.

intellectual or industrial. The fact that Nizami Tağısoy had to postpone his investigations into meykhana shows a very weak academic acceptance of the subject, coupled with non-existent financial or moral support for research into it. My academic interactions with the project he established, however, affected positively the local academic view on it, and hopefully it will continue after my disengagement from the project locally.

Another valuable experience was my visit to the Baku Folklore institute located in Baku Old city. My visit to the institute was at the beginning of my field trip, and the purpose was to find sources. The director of the institute recommended me to rather go to Baku Manuscript Institute (Əlyazmalar İnstitutu) and said that I would not find anything in the Folklore institute about *meykhana*. Another employee of the institute claimed folklorists would rather ‘occupy their time on something more valuable than the street culture of Baku boys’<sup>131</sup>. Also, the informants, including Tağısoy, talking negatively or positively about the genre generally were biased by the genre’s public standing. Thus, for example Tağısoy’s arguments both about the investigations of the genre, and about the artists were usually affected by the defensive character of the conversations.

There is a dominant set of ideas within the meykhana environment. In my study, both my main informants and others informants shared notions that clearly reflected a fundamental dichotomy between financial and social standing, and low and high statuses. The poles that reveal meykhana’s social context appear in each of these dichotomies:

Bedihe	versus	Meykhana
Show	versus	Authentic
West	versus	East
Men wearing ties (Qalstuklu)	versus	Men not wearing ties (Qalstuksuz)
Them	versus	Us
Privileged	versus	Underprivileged

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<sup>131</sup> Conversations in the Folklore Institute, Baku, Oct. 12, 2011

Men and women <sup>132</sup>	vs.	Men
Pop	versus	Folk
Artist	versus	Poet <sup>133</sup>

### 10.3 Women in Meykhana

Privately organised meykhana events are a part of the groom's wedding celebration, where all the participants are men. Accordingly, meykhana develops in environments strictly consisting of men. However women are included as a part of acts of duets between male meykhana performers and female singer on broadcasted meykhana scene. Since my initial technical approach in the interviews was mainly concentrated around what performers themselves thought was interesting to talk about, the issue about women was not touched at all. The answers I got to specific questions I subsequently asked, however, did not provide fruitful answers. Both artist and scholars thought that the subject "women in meykhana" was neither relevant nor interesting, mainly because the women in meykhana are almost on a non-existing level. Meykhana is obviously not a profession suitable for Muslim women, it is said. The subject "women in meykhana" was first taken up in an interview with Hacı Əli. He referred to the absence of women as due to as meykhana's stagnation, its status quo that is misinterpreted. It was very clearly stated by informant that women are not invited and have never been part of the art of meykhana. However, this is not true, because the theatre scene at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had women on stage performing meykhana. Also, the meykhana scene of Azerbaijanis in Georgia consists of a female majority. From what my performer informants say, it seems that the genre is affected by strong stereotypes of gender roles. For example, Hacı Əli said, 'It is hard to battle against women, to disgrace them as we do with men, to swear, drink and smoke around them, and in addition women cannot improvise meykhana...' The interest from the women's side however, is clear, as the television competitions tried to include

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<sup>132</sup> Generally there are many female artists in popular Azerbaijani music. Women (but quite few) are met in TV programs relating to meykhana, either as a part of duets or in the audience.

<sup>133</sup> Here by artist vs poet is meant mainly lyricists who have more focus on musical sense and stage appearance, vs. the poets who have more focus on the literary sense (although many meykhana performers are referred as poets.)



them at some point. Television commercials for this were created and broadcasted too, but a short time after, women's participations in meykhana were stopped due to weak acceptance by the audience.

#### 10.4 Trance and Ecstatic Feelings

Although trance-like features are mentioned by all of my informants, none of them has experienced trance-like states of mind, but rather a kind of ecstatic effect, defined as *vecd* by some of informers.

Hacı Əli:

There is a [certain] condition [that you can get into] in meykhana. Nowadays you do not have that. In order to come to this state, the sportsmen call it *razminka*,<sup>134</sup> you warm up for half an hour [or] forty-five minutes. After [about] forty-five minutes of improvising and battling, a second wind happens for a person. Then whatever thought you want to express, it feels just like speech, just usual conversation, but it comes in a poetic form. It just goes on and on. The words drip down from your mouth. There is a state like this. But it is impossible [to achieve it] in front of cameras.<sup>135</sup>

Fərid:

Meykhana performers come to a state of *vecd* [ecstatic feeling]. And it is necessary in order to show one's real opinion of one certain subject [... *meyxanaçılar vəcda gəlir. Və gəlməlidir ki bir şeyə həqiqi münasibət bildirsinlər.*

Hacı Qəzəlxan:

... To come into *vecd*.. when *vecd* arrives, you can stumble and get confused by the fact that you have approached that state of mind. It is as if you look down from above normal human thought. But it is as if you do stay up there. It is like, say, you stand behind a wall and do not see what happens on the other side. You jump and look at the other side. During this jump, whatever you see, whatever you experience... when you are in that state of mind, that state comes to you as one hoop of a chain. When you jump, you see that chain. But when you land,

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<sup>134</sup> Russian for *warming up*.

<sup>135</sup> *Meyxanada belə bir hal olur. İndi bu hal yoxdur. O hala gəlmək üçün.. İdmançılar ona razminka deyir.. İsinirsən yarım saat 45 dəqiqə.. Elə bil ki 45 dəqiqə meyxana deyəndən sonra, dəyişəndən sonra adamda ikinci dıxaniyə açılır. Onda sən istədiyin fikiri demək üçün elə bil ki, danışsan elə bil adi söhbət kimi amma bunu şerlə danışsan. Gedir eee... Söz özü süzülür. Belə bir hal var. Amma bu kamera qarşısında mümkün deyil. ...*

this hoop becomes what you are writing.<sup>136</sup>

Even if these trance-like features can be seen as a feature of meykhana, they are not characteristic of it. My informants are aware that this moment is not easily achieved, but possible. A free, independent and comfortable environment is required. If there is something disturbing, something or someone present, or if the rhythm is not correctly held, or the performance is being recorded or watched by unfamiliar people, or even when one battler realizes the weaknesses of the other battler, as mentioned by Hacı Əli, the achievement of the trance-like states is not possible. In order to be able to get into this condition, performers have to enjoy each other's company at the artistic level of opponents in a grand poetic battle.

The repetitive syncopated rhythm at the core of this genre, together with the monotonous poetic form of the texts, can remind one of chanting and might bring an ecstatic feeling both to the audience and the performers. It is said by 4 of my 5 informants that the chanting and the trance-like poetics of meykhana might have been appropriated from the rites of the travelling Sufi beggar monks.

Nevertheless, when one of the primary functions of meykhana (improvisation within free environments) are distorted by rules, restrictions and various forms of censorship, that has an effect on some of the attributes of meykhana, as well as on its inspirational dimension. Free environments around performers establish the grounds for the birth of original thoughts and ecstatic moments, which involve not only the performer's talent but also his personal points of view. And only in a free environment can one tell his true reactions to something. What this means is that broadcasted competitions do not have the purpose of spreading the performers' personal truths and realities.

Although contact between the meykhana performer and the world of trance does not sound so convincing, it could perhaps be said to play a role in inspiring the performers when one takes the pre-Islamic and shamanistic customs of the region into consideration. Shamanistic mythology did not totally vanish, despite continuous

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*vəcdə gəlmək... vəcd gələndə ola bilsin ki çaşıb qalırsan ki, şaşqınlıq tutsun səni ki, sən bu gədər aql-ı külə yaxınlaşmış oldun. Adi insani düşüncədən yuxarıdan baxdın elə bil, amma orda gəlmədin elə bil... Bir hasarın dalında dayanmışan görmürsən o tərəfdə olanı. Sən attanıb baxırsan hasarın o tərəfinə.. I oppandıqın müddətdə nə görürsən aldığım təəssürat nədirsə...əhl-i küldən gələndə o fikir zəncirin bir halqasıdır elə bil gəlir sənün üçün... o attananda zənciri gördün amma düşəndə o yazdığın bir halqa olur.*

Islamization over a 1000-year period, and is still alive in both folklore and musical poetic thinking. Azerbaijanis are frequent visitors of local *pirs*:<sup>137</sup> venues and houses of superstitious beliefs, exorcism rituals and consultations for healing. Dozens of *pirs* exist today in Azerbaijan, which by locals considered and believed to be heritage from shamanistic thinking. According to Tağısoy, meykhana shares the same origin with *shamans*. At the same time the genre is also strongly influenced by the period of the expansion of Islam in the region and particularly the Dervish culture, which seriously gained a foothold in the region from XI century on. Tağısoy states that dervish singing and poetry, which has had an impact on religious odes and elegies (*mərsiyyə* and *gəsidə* respectively), has undoubtedly left their traces in meykhana's performative qualities. After the acceptance of Islam, Turkic cultures experienced a new form of religious practice. A synthesis of Shamanism, Zoroastrian customs and Sufism resulted in the formation of folk Islam (*xalq islami*). Leaders of Sufi houses, babas and sheikhs stepped into Islam with shamanistic thoughts and also behaved as *kams*. As a result, elements, which had not been active agents of Islam proper (such as narrated prayers, whirling prayers), appeared in the Islamic world (Əsgər 2005, 42-44).

## 11. Terminological Inadequacy

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Although local folklorists and linguists have provided a considerable amount of valuable information about oral folk traditions (epics, sagas, tales, proverbs, lullabies, folk songs and ashik songs), no concrete statement or points of view about the origin of meykhana have been made (excluding the sources mentioned in this work).

By mapping the secondary literature on folklore and oral poetics, it becomes clear that there has been a great deal of ambivalence towards meykhana as a poetic genre. Encyclopaedic sources give very simple and brief information about it. Going through

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<sup>137</sup> The term *pir* do not correspond to the usage of the word found in other Muslim areas, where it seems to mean "a 'holy' man, a healer (Cf. the following quotation: Pir tillegges okult kraft og makt. Han har syner of drømmer, han utfører mirakler og går i forbønn for de troende. Han helbreder ved å gi *dam*, puste på den syke, eller han lager amuletter, ta'wiz. [...]) (Vogt 2000: 187) In Azerbaijani *pir* is a venue, a place where the process of healing happens, and not a person.

the secondary literature within oral, folklore, literary and musicological disciplines, one would not come across meykhana amongst the content. This applies mainly to Soviet literature, but also to works that came out after Soviet era. How should a master student deal with this? Therefore, in this part of the thesis, I wish to introduce theoretical problems that have been apparent to me. There will then follow an introduction to the areas I have not had a chance to explore. This will provide the opportunity for others to either build on my findings or criticize them.

### 11.1 'Meykhana is a Type of Folk art'

Even though local scholars have contributed information helpful for researchers such as me, one can easily see weaknesses in their historiographies and conclusions. Accounts of the genre in various lexical works are unsystematic and reveal some terminological and conceptual inadequacies. This has led to two misinterpretations. First of all meykhana in some sources is defined as a type of folk poetry ('*xalq şeri növü*'). Tağısoy and Hacı Qəzəlxan also argue that meykhana is a folk art from the Absheron region (*Abşeron folkloru*). Among the problems of that definition is that meykhanas are created by individual people. There are both well-known authors and youngsters who have an interest in improvising verses and performances, and recently do this on the national stage. To assign meykhana to folk art, which is generally characterised by being a heritage from an anonymous author, is not suitable. Lately, different customs, traditions and genres, generally established practices from the region suddenly is defined as Azerbaijani folklore in different national arenas. A second noticeable problem about assigning meykhana to folklore is, given that a meykhana is usually between fifteen and twenty verses long and each verse is usually between four and six lines, it is almost impossible to memorize them like one would with other local folkloristic customs such as *bayatis*<sup>138</sup>, lullabies, proverbs, etc. Thus, the possibility of reproduction or re-singing, is a folkloristic characteristic, is absent from the meykhana. Usually a few verses or lines that have happened to make a great impression are memorized and live on - and usually not in the context in which they were created in the originating performance.

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<sup>138</sup> Bayati: Popular local poetic form consisting of four lines with seven syllables in each. (Mirahmedov 1998: 24)

I agree that meykhana carries qualities that are elements known in Azerbaijani folklore, for example its battle character, which we have met also in ashig riddles and which also is found Finnish *kalevala*, Russian *chastushka* and Caribbean *calypso*. The purpose of the battles is to demonstrate poetic talent. Meykhana also carries episodic elements from folk theatre, for instance the way its performance is the central element and alongside its content. It also carries elements of eastern classical poetry that is present in its text, which creates an underlying rhythm, which is a common ‘spine’ rhythm for many local genres.

### 11.2 ‘Meykhana is Bedihe’

One terminological inadequacy is that *bedihe* (*bədiḥə*, *bədyə* and *bədiyə* are also used) has been used as an ancillary term to meykhana in some sources. Today this has awakened an on-going, fiery debate concerning the substitution of the term *bedihe* for the genre’s name, involving almost all sides, with journalists, scholars and performers with strong opinions arguing on either side. I have not discussed *bedihe* during my interviews, as far as I am aware. None of the CD covers I have seen has used the term *bedihe*. There are some meykhanas that have as short lines as found in *bedihe*, but they are presented as meykhanas in the literature. In the last four years meykhana has attracted a public debate and discussion over the national substitution of the genre’s name with the term *bedihe*. These discussions have been broadcasted on television, and different subjective generalizations have been made about both genres. Very briefly said, one group insist that meykhana’s low social standing is connected to its name, which has to do with alcohol and alcoholic practitioners and therefore should be substituted with *bedihe*. These argumentations usually come among others from the practitioners who have achieved acknowledgement through the mediated meykhana scene. The other group consisting mainly of the performers who have started their meykhana career through local, private arrangements as gatherings and weddings argue that its low status is not connected to its name and should not be substituted. No account of the diachronic development of both terms has been introduced, nor has any systematic account of the sources and materials of the repertoire of classical meykhana and *bedihe* performers been provided in order to support or falsify the arguments.

This subject attracted my attention when I found an article entitled ‘*Meykhana ya bədiḥə sözü aləmi bir-birinə gətib*’, (“The name meyxana vs. bediḥə has caused great disagreement”) published in the *Bakı-xəbər* newspaper, 22 June. The article is an interview with Şeyx Abdul Mahmudbəyov by İradə Səriyeva. They discuss whether the name of the meyxana genre should be changed on a national level to bediḥə. From the general content of the article, it is clear that Mahmudbəyov supports the proposal that the word *meykhana* should be substituted with the word *bediḥə*. The argument he gives is that meyxana means wine house, and it is inappropriate for the name of a musical or poetic genre. Another ‘pro-bediḥə’ article is one by Vüsal Mətləboğlu, ‘*Azərbaycan ədəbiyyatının şifahi qalan janrı, meyxana yoxsa bədiḥə?*’ in the newspaper *Mədəniyyət* 26 of June 2010. The same argument is also given here, that the association of meyxana genre with wine houses has the potential to harm the genre’s new, popular, mediated face. Here it is obvious that the author believes that meyxana means pub or winery and is not aware of the polyseme’s mystical capacities.<sup>139</sup>

The problem in this antagonistic debate in my opinion appears to be connected to the modern market competitiveness and industrialization of the genre in the last ten years. First of all, the debate itself only appeared after the genre began to be mediated through national channels. The business possibilities of the genre were discovered and the assumption arose that all negative attention to the genre and its participants, to its ‘low’ status (cf. chapter 7), would vanish if it had a name other than a synonym for winery. The title of the genre has stereotypical associations with drunken and intoxicated young men, while my findings show that the name originated from an esoteric understanding of universal, mystical meaning, from the forms of divine intoxication within Sufi and Hurufi doctrines (cf. chapter 3). Meykhana today is blended with popular culture but in the transition to this it retains stereotypes about traditional suburban men, while at the same time the genre’s name carries with it connotations of alcoholism. These men thus enter the popular sphere with the stamp of being alcoholic or drug abusers. Nevertheless the audience do not seem to be polarized by the debate of meyxana vs. bediḥə, and performers of both genres attend similar events. They usually know each other and are interviewed by the same

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<sup>139</sup> *Meykhana anlayışı mey evi mənasını ifadə edir. Meyxananın isə bilavasitə mey evi ilə əlaqələndirilməsi köhnəlmiş və yalnız fikirdir*

journalists.

However, the majority of the voices, including all my informants, want it to be taken into consideration that the demand for a name change is not an evolutionary development, but has only been created in the modern context by the performers who frequently appear on television programmes. The usage of a word, idea or notion within a society, group or people should not be made by demand or order, but through a degree of acceptance of the usage of the term that has come to pass. Note that Namiq Mena, one of the very few meyxana and bedihe performers who has contributed significantly to the highlighting of this debate and has supported the word substitution, is nevertheless paradoxically referred to as *meyxanaçı* Namiq Mena and not *bediheçi*, namely as a meyxana performer and not as a bedihe performer.

‘There is a meaning of the word bedihe which is to make fun of somebody and to slander somebody, and one encounters some ghazels with this content. Should we then say all ghazels are meyxanas also?’ (*Bedihe sözünün bir mənası da lağlağı eləmək, şər atmaqdır elə qəzəllər var ele bil ki bediyedir. Onda deyək ki, qəzəllər də meyxanadır?*) - Rafiq. These are the words of Rafiq, who understands the desire to change meyxana’s name. This informant divides the meyxana genre in two in a same way as I have done. First is what he calls ‘authentic’ meyxana, an active agent of medjlises. The second he calls ‘show’ meyxana, which is the meyxana featured in the media, where performers are celebrity faces who produce CDs and perform in national concerts. This second stream he thinks should change its name, but at the same time he does not mean that the replacement name should be *bedihə*.

The ambivalence towards the genre by scholars, in Rəhimova’s opinion, has resulted in confusion of the terms and genres *bedihe* and meyxana with each other. Bedihs include inappropriate language, the unconventional use of swearing and cursing, which has naturally lowered the genre’s reputation. Bedihs therefore gained a name among people as “in between” poetry (in Azerbaijani: *Ara şeri*), or ‘street folklore’ (in Azerbaijani: *küçə folkloru*) (Rəhimova 2003:5). The same term, street folklore, was used about meyxana during my visit to Baku Folklore Institute in October 2010 by their employees. As it is clear, both genres have obviously low cultural and social statuses. So, if they both have low status why would the replacement of the name of meyxana to bedihe would contribute on lifting its status is not clear to me. Bedihe is

a stylistic and performative mode. In lexical sources *bedihə* means to express something by improvising, something said as the first thing comes to one's mind<sup>140</sup>. *Bədəhətən* in Azerbaijani means *improvised*, *improvisational* or *improvising* and is a psycho-physiological process. It is a style of utterance, a tool and an instrument performers use.

There is another very interesting interpretation of the term *bedihe*. It is said that *bedihe* or *bədiyə* could also be derived from the Russian word *бадьа* which is synonym with the word *ведра* and means tub, bucket or container. In Azerbaijani, figurative language there is a saying, *vedrə bağlamaq*, literally to knot a bucket, meaning to ridicule, to fool, to tease or to besot somebody. Examples: *mənə vedrə bağlama* means 'do not fool me'; *bir-birinə vedrə bağlamaq* means 'tease each other'; and *filankəsə vedrə bağladılar* means 'the person was made a fool of'. Sometimes the word *vedrə* 'bucket' can be replaced with the word *bədyə*, e.g. *bədyə bağlama*, which gives a same meaning as the abovementioned Examples: *bədyə demə* - 'do not talk rubbish'; *bədyə deyənlər gəldi* - 'those who speak baloney came'; and *bədyə-bədyə danışma* - 'don't talk nonsense'. These formulations have an insulting connotation. The Russian word *бадьа* sounds like *bədyə* in a dialect of Baku villages, particularly Mashtaga. Some of the properties of this dialect is that *a* sounds like *ə*, *ə* sounds like *e* and *o* sounds like *u*. And *бадьа* sounds like *bədyə*. One other meaning of the word *bədyə* is to talk without thinking or understanding, to talk whatever came to one's mind, also quarrelsome or captious speech. If two people discuss or argue it can be said *məniynən bədyə demə* - 'don't be cantankerous with me.'

The origin of the word is debatable. Nevertheless, in order to highlight the meaning of the word, I wish to provide another quotes, here taken from Elçin 2005: 391.

'In the village of Mashtaga, old women used to gather. To make fun of each other they used to say *bedihe*.

How old are you  
your head is white  
Mesme is married to one boy

<sup>140</sup> *Bedihe- Ərəb sözü: 1.Fikirləşmədən, qabaqcadan hazırlaşmadan söylənilən söz, şeir, hazır cavablılıq; 2. Aşıq və bediheçilərin hazırlamadan döşdən dedikləri mənzum parçalar. (Azərbaycan dilinin izahlı lüğəti. Bakı (Az SSR Elm. Akad. Nəşriyyatı), 1964, p 236*



His gun is that big',<sup>141</sup>

### 11.3 'Meykhana is a Folk Art and Classical Poetry'

An example of the inconsistency regarding the terminology is demonstrated in the book *Abseron meyxanaları*. Its first pages state, 'Meykhana is one of the oldest types of classical poetry' (*meyxana klassik azərbaycan ədəbiyyatının ən qədim janrlarından biri*). Later the author refers to it as a 'type of oral folk poetry' (*şifahi xalq ədəbiyyatının bir növü*) and gives the information, 'among people especially in Absheron, Baku and Baku villages it has gained popularity with the name bedye (bedihe)' (*xalq arasında xüsussilə Abşeron bölgəsində, Bakıda və Bakı kəndlərində bədyə (bədiyə) adı ilə yayılıb şöhrət tapmış*).

### 11.4 The Genre Meykhana and the Term Meykhana

In his investigation of the history of ashiq culture, Professor Məhərrəm Gasımlı very briefly draws the focus to the religious symbolic meaning of the meyxana genre, comparing it to ashiq art. From looking at the etymology, he argues that the poetic form of meyxana has served very sectarian interests for a long period. He writes:

The poetic form 'meykhana' is popular among people, and inevitably it has been serving sectarian purposes. The fact that meyxanas are said with a particular voice and emotion shows that they were used as an ecstatic tool in *tekke* [religious] ceremonies. Most probably in the beginning meyxanas only consisted of Sufi content but because of the impact of the twentieth century's vulgar sociology it changed its direction and gained a more shallow and simplified content. Still, traces of its historical semantic value can be seen in its name and in the mode of its utterance. Meykhana practised in the pir 'effendi ocağı' [the house of wise] existing today in Borchali and Qaxakh (progeny of Seyid Nigari) are similar to its historical

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*Məştağa kəndində qoca arvadlar bir yerə yığılıb zərfat edərkən bir-birinə sataşib bədyə deyərtilər:*

*Neçədir yaşın  
ağarıb başın.  
Məsmə gedib bir oğlana  
tapançacı bu boydana ...*

Justifications, however, of these statements are weak. First of all it is unclear why the genre inevitably was serving sectarian purposes. Secondly there are no arguments about why the content of the meykhana in the beginning were consisting of Sufi poetry. Here we witness the clear tendency of this author to assigning the genre, with very little critical approach, to be just another religious project, by directly transferring the semiotics of the *term* to the semiotics of the *genre*. One misunderstanding should be cleared up. I do not doubt that some motifs have come into the contemporary artistic realm from the old established patterns of classical poetry<sup>143</sup> and others from customs in which folkloristic allegories have symbolic religious content. However, a researcher should be careful in making statements like meykhana 'is part of' religious poetry. It cannot be automatically assumed to be true that the existence of allegories within a genre indicates that that genre is a sectarian, genre or exclusively rooted in Islam, etc. First of all, the name of the genre could have been established or developed in the Islamic period. However, that gives one no reason to think that the custom of artistic battling would be the result of religious practice. In addition, although in the semantics the word has polysemy, meaning also 'wine' and 'tavern', as far as I am aware, Sufis did not discover drinking and wine, and those meanings appear contrary to Islam anyway. Thus the word would not seem to be rooted in Islam. Also, as can be seen in this thesis, the earliest written meykhana sources do not have religious content. A better interpretation would be to consider a synthesis of pre-Islamic agents with Islamic agents, religious rules, existing traditions and norms creating the grounds for polysemy to bloom. But ultimately, it is unknown if meykhana has always carried the humorous language of young men gathered together, or if it was originally religious sectarian poetry. This thesis does not claim anything about its origin.

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*Xalq arasında yayılmış «meyxana» şeir forması da, heç şübhəsiz ki, uzun zaman təriqətin xidmətində dayanmışdır. Meyxanain xüsusi avaz və çılğınlıqla ifa olunması ondan ecstatic vasitə kimi təkkə mərasimlərində istifadə edildiyini göstərir. Çox gumanki, əvvəla əsasən Sufi mətnlərindən ibarət olan «meyxana»lar sonradan –XX yüzillik vulgar sosiologiyasının təsiri altında öz məzmun istigamətini dəyişmiş və xeyli dərəcədə bəsitləşərək bayağılaşmışdır. Şeirin adı və ifa tərz-i-tarixi semantic mahiyyətin izlərini hələ də gorumaqdadır. Borçalı və Qazaxda indiyədək yaşamaqda davam edən «Əfəndi ocağı»nda (Seyid Nigari ardıcılıarı) icra olunan «meyxana»lar tarixi mahiyyətinə uyğun şəkildədir.*

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e.g., five line meykahanas have similarities in their thyming structures to classical eastern poetry *mukhammes* with the form of aaaaa, bbbba, cccca.

## 12. Conclusions

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### 12.1 Demarcation of Excluded Sources

As a poetic genre, meykhana has been influenced by local music and has become musical. Its strong performative qualities caused it to find its way into the musical comedy operetta *Koroğlu* and its elements are also found in Suleyman Rustəm's *Durna* and Emin Sabitoğlu's *Hicran*. Composers such as Tofiq Guleyev and Emin Sabitoğlu among others inserted meykhana into the infrastructure of the motion picture. Motion pictures such as *Qəzəlxan*, *Bizim Cəbiş müəllim*, *Fransız*, *Yeddi oğul istərəm*, *Yuxu*, *Dəli Kür* are among the films in which meykhana was used in sequences as background elements, which in my opinion enriched the dramaturgic effect.

However, my thesis does not include analysis of the genre's traces within theatre, opera, operettas, musicals, motion pictures classical music and choirs. Meykhana's connection to musical genres and resemblance with folk music and folkloristic poetry as *goşma* and *gəraylı* is also not analysed here. Also investigations on the similarities between classical poetry *mukhammas* (cf. footnote 143), with five strophe meykhanas have not been covered in this study.

The size of this thesis does not allow for a collective study of the listeners. However, my great wish for further projects is analysis of the structural reproduction of how practitioners relate to the genre in their daily lives, and how meykhana influences their views on history, politics and society.

Speaking of the future potential of the project here I would like briefly to stress two important points. First, as seen from the thesis limited space is dedicated to performance of meykhana itself and its performative context. That is especially important when the transcriptions of the lyrics are primary sources. The main reason for this limitation is that my wishes to participate at live events were denied.

Second, as an initial project my aim has been to widely describe the genre based on written material and my field trip observations. Therefore most natural for me has been to focus on local qualities of the genre, both located in Baku villages, written

sources, and Tv and radio programs. Nevertheless *meykhana* is similar to other known phenomena from modern world, and there exist a research traditions dealing with this field. Here I primarily mean *spoken word poetry* and poetry readings / *poetry slam*, some forms of oral improvised theater, as well as some forms of hip hop / rap. However, having *meykhana* researched under the common denominator with abovementioned genres and traditions would have taken the study to a higher level of abstraction.

## 12.2 How to describe the modern meykhana genre

Meykhana's peculiarity is that it is created in two dimensions. One is the performative dimension: performances mainly battles, carrying episodic elements of folk spectacle, theatre and ceremony. The other dimension is poetic which carries elements of eastern classical poetry concentrating on the length of vowels. We can witness all this in the synthesis and the influence of rhythm, tempo and music, etc. These two dimensions belong to different historical times. While the genre gained its performative character through the impact of folk customs as spectacle and theatres before Islam, its spoken characteristics have similarities with religious expressions and also (poetically) metric utterances the genre gained when Islam began to spread in the region.

The genre, which mostly belonged to folkloric culture at the beginning of the century, is today a transgressing genre, mainly fulfilling the criteria of a 'popular' genre, which is then cross-fertilized with many other genres. Because there is little separation between the performer and the audience (with the exception of broadcasted competitions, where the audience only can interact if invited), because it is staged in an everyday context, and in addition, because some meykhanas are topical, the genre is quite close to folk music. At the same time, as a music provided from the 'top down' (through shows, radio programmes, television competitions)<sup>144</sup> the lack of significant artistic ambition (the only aim being profit and commercial reward) brings it closer to contemporary popular culture today.

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<sup>144</sup> Definition of Pop: 'Pop is not driven by any significant ambition except profit and commercial reward. Its history is a history of serial or standardised production and, in musical terms, it is essentially conservative. Pop is about giving people what they already know they want rather than pushing up against technological constraints or aesthetic conventions. [...] Pop is music provided from on high (by record companies, radio programmers and concert promoters) rather than being made from below. [...]' (Frith 2001, 96)

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## Appendix I

Meykhana in original script, published in 1922

« تورك درام » قروڭوقى، نشرىيى  
  
شهور «ميخانه» سوبله به نلرمز يولداش على آغا  
واحد، ايله باقىر جبارزاده طرفندن آذربايجان  
صحنه لرنده سوبله ديگري ميخانه لريندن

————— (بر نمونه) —————

# ميخانه



برنجى طبع



۱۴۴۸  
سنه هجرى

۱۹۲۲  
سنه ميلادى

————— (شهر باكو) —————

- گورونور چشمیه -

(بامبوغی هواستده دخی اوقونور)

علی آغاه واحد او کسر که دوشیشدی بد خیاله  
فکری بو ایدی ضربه وورسون کماله  
یتیمه دی مقصده دوش ، ملاله  
حال پریشان گورونور چشمیه

باقیر جبارزاده فونستانتینک\* بو ایدی فکر خیالی  
سوفیاده یقین بره حلالی  
شیر گوروب او مصطفی کمالی  
خوف حراسان گورونور چشمیه

«واحد» - غریقلرده ایتشدیلر خام خیال  
فکرلری بو ایدی یقین کمال  
عاقبت اولدی اوزلری پایمال  
ایندی پشیمان گورونور چشمیه

.....  
\* فونستانتین - یونانلار ک فرالی در.

باقير - اينگيايسلر قويدى اونلارى گيره  
يوز الى بىك قيريلدى بردن بىره  
قاچوب سوخديلار اوزلريك ايزميره\*  
تامى نالان گورونور چشميه

---

واحد - انگيلچان هر طرفى آولايوب  
دهنيكىنى گاه قالچاغى تولايوب  
قاچيردوب بولشه وىك هامك فاوлайوب  
ايمدى لهستان گورونور چشميه

---

باقير - دنيكىنده قولچاقلا بىرله شديلر  
شورا حكومتيله چكىشديلر  
آخرده تاب ايمه يوب سوروشديلر  
هپسى سر كردان گورونور چشميه

---

(\* ايزمير: آناطوليك غرب طرفنده بويوك م  
شهردر.

واحد - کمالچی لار اوگون بختیار اولدی  
شورا حکومتی طرفدار اولدی  
آتاتانک دنیا گوزینه تار اولدی  
دردی بی دره ان گورونور چشمیه

---

باقیر - چون یاشاسین خلق ایچین زحمت چکیر  
دو شمنلری قروب نوت کبی تو کیر  
باش قوماندان تورک اوغلی قارا بکیر  
رستم دستان گورونور چشمیه

---

واحد - عصمت پاشا دوروب مرد مردانه  
یونایونلاره قارشو چیقوب میدانه  
دشمنلرک باغریک دونده روب قانه  
حریده اصلان گورونور چشمیه

---

— ۵ —

(کمال)

باقیر - دشمنلرک باغرینی قان ایدرلر  
آنتا نایه گوجلرک بیلدیرلر  
جنک ایدرلر: تولورلر، تولدیرلر  
بتون جان فشان گورونور چشمیه

(گلگی وور)

وحد - بوراقما جهد ایله قمار بازلی  
ایله ه هیچ یر کسه کارسازلی  
عادت ایله چالیش دانوس بازلی  
ترک ایله عادتکی گلگی وور.

باقیر - نه ایشک وار منیمله قماربازم  
نه بورجکا لوشام، اورد گم قازام  
عادتدر قدیمدن دانوس بازام  
گوزله سن اوز حرمتکی گلگی وور.



واحد- ایستمه یولداشك امام ویردینی  
چیکمه گیلن جماعتك دردینی  
چایچی دکالارینده اوور نردینی  
سن ایله اوز عشرتگی کلگی وور.

---

باقیر - عارف اولوب باشلاماچوق نردیدن  
سن کیشین دایشگیلن مردیدن  
چوق بهالقدر گل قاجاق شهردن  
کوتورسن اوز عبرتگی کلگی وور.

---

واحد- دواتگی یدیک دوشمین یوقسولینفا  
گیر قبره نولگیلن بر یوللیفا  
یا رشوت ویر بازدیر اوزك قوللیفا  
سندہ گیت آل رشوتگی کلگی وور.

---

باقیر - بر نوردن ایشیتشم گون اورطه  
دیور چیقوب اوتوز مینه یومورطه  
من قویون اولیشام دونوب اوقورطه  
بقاله وور تهنتگی گلگی وور.

---

واحد - قوربان اولوم کبابچی نك شستینه شیشینه  
یاقشی دوروب جماعتك قصدینه  
گونده گل اون یك پیتی نك اوستینه  
قوی ایتسینلر غیبتگی گلگی وور.

---

باقیر - وقت کیچیر یتیشمه دیک مطلبه  
قصابکه وار گلمز دینه مذهبه  
کورهن زمانده دیگیان قصابه  
آی ناگری تو کسین اتگی گلگی وور.

---

واحد - چوره کچی سن کلمه رحمه مرو نه  
نه بورجگا آجلار دوشوب ذلته  
صات چوره کی سن بره بش قیمته  
آرتیق ایله دولتی کلتکی وور.

---

باقیر - سلطانان منه دیک نه حاجت  
عسکرلیکدن قاچماغی ایله عادت  
قوی کیچین دشمن الیه ولایت  
سن چکه اوز غیرتگی کلتکی وور!

---

واحد - عسکر اولساق آرتیق اولار نامز  
بو ایشدن آسلیی در سراقجامز  
کړک بز عسکرلیک ایدک هامز  
کوزله اوز شهرتگی کلتکی وور.

---

(دولانماق اولمير)

واحد- دانیشمايورسان بهالقدان نه دن?  
کمان سنی وار ایشده بر او کره ده ز!  
چوق بهالقدر: تولیرم غصه دن  
بو عصرده آده دولانماق اولمير.

---

باقیر- ایسته میوردیمکه آجام مطلبی  
بهاچیلیقدا یوق: دیشی، مذهبی  
هیچ سالمايورسن یادیکا قصایی  
کلمیشیک فریاده دولانماق اولمیر!

---

واحد- کون به گوندن بهالانیر مامپاسی  
یاغچیقوب اوچ یوزمینه کروانکه سی  
ایله آدم وار هیچ یوقدر قوه سی  
عمری کیدیر باده دولانماق اولمیر!

---

باقير - عقلی اول دینج اولوب راحت اوتی  
فت سه پوب اوستیه ووردیک اونی  
دورت میلیونه چیتوبدر اونک پوتی  
غرض بودنیاده دولانماق اولمیر!

واحد - آجلق دوتوب هر طرفی هر یانی  
آجلاریک کوکله چیتوب افغانی  
یاردیم ایدهر هر کیملک وار وجدانی  
یله بو ائشاده دولانماق اولمیر!

باقیر - چوره کجی لر یاقشی آلوب میدانی  
علائک که ذره یوقدر وجدانی  
کیزله دیر آباردا: آریا، بوغدانی  
بعضی حرامزاده دولانماق اولمیر!

( گل گل آي ايوي داغليش )

- بهالقدان، شكایت -

واحد - اوتوز مينه يومورطه، يتيمش مين منات چورهك  
يوزاون مينهات چيقوب كاسب دولانسين گورهك  
بوايشه بير من ييلن، چاره اولنسون كرك  
اللي مين كرتوف صوغان گل گل آي ايوي داغليش

باقير - بونجه بهالق اولماز خرج الندن تو كولدم  
بو كوچ كلقت النده كمان كيبي بو كولدم  
قالمايوب منده نوان: داغليدم هم سو كولدم  
ايشيم اولوبدر يمان گل گل آي ايوي داغليش

واحد - اشاره در بوسوز لرء- ارف اولان اصنافه  
سويله سينلر گوره نده چور كچي به علاقه  
عالم ثولير آجندان برجه كليك انصافه  
خلقه بوقدر توان گل گل آي ايوي داغليش

باقیر - گل بو نصیحتاری تولا گلین بر یانه  
 قور قوم اودر کیم منی آخر سالان قانا  
 محکمه یوز دیسون گله یه جک ایمانا  
 ایشیم اولوبدرخان گل گل آی ابوی داغلمیش

واحد - او کوتلری بازارده دوشمیش ایدیم انکله  
 حقیقت باقدیم ایشه یلدیم نه در مسئله  
 بر نفر کوردیم دیور بیر قدر کیتسه یله  
 عالم اولیر آجندان گل گل آی ابوی داغلمیش

باقیر - ده کیشدیردیک حالی سن کنه آقشام چاغی  
 هر کون سحر یورسن شیت باغ ایله قایماغی  
 منیم قیزیم تاپما یور آیاغنا باشماغی  
 نیکینده دیک دابان گل گل آی ابوی داغلمیش

واحد - بر کره امتحان چون کیت ییوگا قیل نظر  
تورک دلی دایشان اورادا آقاراسان سربسر  
بنجه ینه تاپمازسان نمونه ایچین بر قمر  
ایستهرسن یوزمین کره هر طرف هر یانه باق

باقیر - بر سوز دیوم ییودان ایندی سکا داماغلی  
کیتیشدیم دونن اورا کورمدیم بر باباقلی  
شاپقا باشنداهامی گزبردی قاش قاباقلی  
قورقودان هیچ دینمه دیم منده حر اسانه باق

واحد - خیاباه زاره دونمش سنک نه بورجک شهر  
سکی لردن کیچمک اوامیر دیورسن شام سحر  
قومونخوز دوتسین کرک اوزی بو ایشدن خبر  
کاسبلار محله سنده خانه ویرانه باق !



Transliteration of the meyxana, published in 1922 to Latin script

### **Türk Dram – Krujoku nəşriyyatı**

Məşhur “Meyxana” söyləyənlərimiz yoldaş Əli Ağ “Vahid” ilə Bağır Cabarzadə tərəfindən Azərbaycan səhnələrində söylədikləri meyxanələrindən

(Bir nümunə)

MEYXANƏ

Birinci təbi

1338

Sinə Hicri

1922

Sinə Miladi

- 2 -

--- Görünür çeşmimə ---

(Pambuğu havasında dəxi oxunur)

Vahid - O kəslər ki, düşmüşdü bəd xəyalə  
Fikri bu idi zərbə vursun kəmalə  
Yetmədi məqsədə düşdü məlalə  
Hal pərişan görünür çeşmimə

Bağır - Konstantilik\* bu idi fikri xəyali  
Sofyadə yəqin yerə həlalı  
Şir görüb o Mustafa Kəmalı  
Xof hər asan görünür çeşmimə

Vahid - Qərinələrdə yetişdilər xam xəyal  
Fikirləri bu idi yıxılsın Kəmal  
Aqibət oldu özləri payı mal  
İmdi peşiman görünür çeşmimə

\* Konstantin – Yunanların kralıdır

- 3 -

Bağır - İngilislər qoydi onları girə  
Yüz əlli bin qırıldı birdən birə  
Qaçub soxdilər özlərin İzmirə\*  
Tamami nalan görünür çeşmimə

Vahid - Əngilçan hər tərəfi ovlayıb  
Denikini gah qolçağı tollayub  
Qaçırdub bolşevik hamən qovlayub  
İndi Ləhstan görünür çeşmimə

Bağır - Denikində qolçağla birləşdilər  
Şura hökuməti ilə çəkişdilər  
Axirda tab etməyub sürüşdilər  
Həpsi sər gərdan görünür çeşmimə

---

\* İzmir – Anadolunun qərb tərəfində böyük bir şəhər

- 4 -

Vahid - Kəmalçılar o gün bəxtiyar oldi  
Şura hökumətnə tərəfdar oldi  
Antantanın dünya gözinə tar oldi  
Dərdi bu dərman görünür çeşmimə

Bağır - Çox yaşasın xəlq için zəhmət çəkir  
Düşmənləri qırıb tut kimi təkir  
Baş qomandan türk oğlu Qara Bəkir  
Rüstəmi dəstan görünür çeşmimə

Vahid - Əsmət Paşa durub mərd mərdanə

Yunanunlarə qarşı çıxıb meydana  
Düşmənlərin bağrın döndərüb qanə  
Hərbdə aslan görünür çeşmimə

- 5 -

(Kəmal)

Bağır - Düşmənlərin bağrını qan edərlər  
Antantaya güclərin bildirərlər  
Cəng edərlər: ölürlər, öldirərlər  
Bütün can fəşan görünür çeşmimə

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(Gələni vur)

Vahid - Buraxma cəhd ilə qumarbazlığı  
Eləmə haç bir kəsə karsazlığı  
Adət ilə çalış danosbazlığı  
Tərk eləmə adətki gələni vur.

Bağır - Nə işin var mənimlə qumarbazam  
Nə borcuna quşam, ördəgəm, qazam  
Adətimdir qədimdən danos yazam  
Gözləsən öz hörmətni gələni vur.

- 6 -

Vahid - İstəmə yoldaşın İmam virdini  
Çəkmə gilən camaatin dərini  
Çayçı dükanlarında vur nərdini  
Sən elə öz işrətini gələni vur.

Bağır - Arif olub başlama çor nərddidən  
Sən kişisən danışgilən mərddidən  
Çox bahalıqdı gəl qaçaq şəhridən  
Götür sən öz ibrətini gələni vur.

Vahid - Dövlətini yedin düşmüsən yoxsulluğa  
Gir qəbrə ölgilən bir yolluğa  
Ya rüşvət ver yazdır özün qulluğa  
Səndə get al rüşvətivi gələni vur.

- 7 -

Bağır - Bir nəfərdən eşitmişəm gün orta  
Diyir çıxıb otuz minə yumurta  
Mən qoyun olmuşam dönüb o qurta  
Bəqalə vur töhmətini gələni vur.

Vahid - Qurban olum kəbabçının şəstinə şişinə  
Yaxşı durub cəmaətin qəsdinə  
Gündə gəl on bin pitinin üstünə  
Qoy etsinlər qiybətini gələni vur.

Bağır - Vəxt keçir yetişmədin mətləbə  
Qəsab ki var gəlməz dinə məshəbə  
Görməz zəmanədə deyməgilən qəssabə  
Ay tanrı töksün ətini gələni vur.

- 8 -

Vahid - Çörəkçisən gəlmə rəhmə mürvətə  
Nə borcuna aclar düşüb zillərə  
Sat çörəgi sən birə beş qiymətə  
Artıq elə dövlətini gələni vur.

Bağır - Müsəlmansan sənə deməg nə hacət

Əsgərlikdən qaçmağı eylə adət  
Qoy keçsin düşmən əlinə velayət  
Sən çəkmə öz qeyrətini gələni vur!  
Vahid - Əsgər olsağ artıq olar namımız  
Bu işdən aslıdır sərəncamımız  
Gərək biz əsgərlik edəg hamımız  
Gözləmə öz şöhrətini gələni vur.

- 9 -

(Dolanmağ olmur)  
Vahid - Danışmayırsan bahalıqdan nədən?  
Kəman səni var işdə bir o kərədən  
Çox bəhaliqdi : ölərəm qüssədən  
Bu əsrdə adə dolanmağ olmur.  
Bağır - İstəmərdimke açam mətləbi  
Bəhaçılıqda yox : dini, məssəbi  
Hiç salmayırsan yadına qəssabi  
Gəlmişik fəryada dolanmağ olmur!  
Vahid - Günbəgündən bəhalanır mampası  
Yağ çıxıb üç yüz minə girvənkəsi  
Elə adam var hiç yoxdur quvvəsi  
Ömrü gedirbadə dolanmağ olmur!

- 10 -

Bağır - Əməlli ol dinc olub rahat oti  
Neft səpib üstümə vurdin oti  
Dörd milyonə çıxıdu onun puti  
Qərək bu dünyadə dolanmağ olmur!  
Vahid - Aclıq tutub hər tərəfi hər yanı

Acların göglərə çıxub əfğanı  
Yardım edər hər kimin var vecdanı  
Belə bu əsnadə dolanmağ olmur!  
Bağır - Çörəkçilər yaxşı alub meydanı  
Əllafın ke zərrə yoxdur vecdanı  
Gizlədir ambarda : arpa, buğdanı  
Bəzi hərəməzadə dolanmağ olmur!

- 11 -

(Gəl gəl ay evi dağılmış)  
- Bahalıqdan şikayət -  
Vahid - Otuz minə yumurtə, yetmiş min manat çörək  
Yüz on minə ət çıxub kasıb dolansun gərək  
Bu işə bir mən bilən, çarə olunsun gərək  
Əlli min kərtəf soğan gəl gəl ay evi dağılmış  
Bağır - Buncə bəhalıq olmaz xərc əlindən töküldüm  
Bu köç külfət əlində kaman kibi büküldüm  
Qalmaqub məndə təvan:dağıldım həm söküldüm  
İşim olubdur yəman gəl gəl ay evi dağılmış  
Vahid - İşarədir bu sözlər arif olan əsnafə  
Söyləsinlər görəndə çor keçiyə əllafə  
Aləm ölər acından bircə gəlin insafə  
Xəlqdə bu qədər təvan gəl gəl ay evi dağılmış

- 12 -

Bağır - Gəl bu nəsihətləri tulla gilən bir yanə  
Qorxum odur kim mənə axır salasan qanə  
Möhtəkirə yüz desön gəlməyəcək imanə  
İşim olubdur fəğan gəl gəl ay evi dağılmış

Vahid - O günləri bazardə düşmüş idim əngələ  
Həqiqət baxdım işə bildim nədir məshələ  
Bir nəfər gördüm diyir bir qədər gitsə belə  
Aləm ölər acından gəl gəl ay evi dağılmış

Bağır - Değişdirdin halimi sən gənə axşamçağı  
Hər gün səhər yiyirsən şit yağ ilə qaymağı  
Mənim qızım tapmayır ayağına başmağı  
Səninkində dik daban gəl gəl ay evi dağılmış

- 13 -

Vahid - Hökümət istər alsın bəhalığın qabağın  
Bu yandan möhtəkirlər salladub qaş qabağın  
Qəssab ətin gözlədir çor keçilər tabağın  
Qaçıb ölürlər nəhan gəl gəl ay evi dağılmış

Bağır - Bir sözüm vardır bizim bu qonşumuz bəqqalə  
Aşnam olub milyardir salam vermir səqqalə  
Xəlqa baha satmağa malın yığıb padvalə  
Yoxdır dərdimə dərman gəl gəl ay evi dağılmış

(.....Bax)

Həmin meyxañə "26"lar naminə olan azadə tənqid təbiğ (Satiragid) teatrosında söylənilmişdi.

Vahid - Üç ay var elan edir xəlqə günbəgün qəzit  
Azəri türkləri için açılıbdır Satiragid  
Bu yerdə toplaşmalı ümuma etməñ sovet  
Səhnəyə deqqət yetir ondaki nöqsanə bax!

-14 -

Bağır - Səhnəmiz azadədir diyir mərd mərdanə  
Kim olsa iradını çıxardacaq meydanə  
İstər tiatro olsun istər olsun meyxanə  
Açub bəsirət gözün səhnəyə mərdanə bax

Vahid - Alış verişçilərdən çox açırsan söhbəti  
Dəmir yol işçilərnə etməyirsən töhməti  
Bu qədər ke alırlar cəmaətdən rüşvəti  
Milyonlar rüşvət yeyən sahibi vicdanə bax!

Bağır - Vağzaldə düz üç aydır girmişəm mən xidmətə  
Eləyirəm sidqilə xidmətimi millətə  
Bir vaqon beş milyonə dadanmışam rüşvətə  
Oçiretdə kasıblar etdigi əfğanə bax!

- 15 -

Vahid - Bir kərə imtahançün get yetir gilə nəzər  
Türk dili danışan oradə axtarasan sərbəsər  
Bunca yenə tapmazsan nümunə için bir nəfər  
İstərsən yüz min kərə hər tərəf hər yanə bax

Bağır - Bir söz diyim bivədan indi sənə damağlı  
Gitmişdim dünən ora görmədim bir papağlı  
Şapka başında hamı gəzirdi qaş qabağlı  
Qorxudan hiç dinmədim məndə hərasanə bax

Vahid - Xərabəzarə dönmüş sənənin nə borcun şəhər  
Səkilərdən keçmək olmur diyirsən şami səhər  
Qommunxoz dutsin gərək ozu bu işdən xəbər  
Kasıblar məhəlləsində xaneyi virana bax!

- 16 -



Bağır -       İstəmirəm mən sənə çoxda verim dərdsər  
Axirinci sualım budur sənə muxtəsər  
İdarələrdən məni eyləgilən baxəbər  
Neft qumdan söhbət aç bir məni nalanə bax!

Vahid -       Neft qumun halinə git eylə bir nəzarə  
Alış veriş əlindən bazarə dönüb idarə  
Kifayətdir arifə mən bilən bir işarə  
Mətləbin üstün açma qadiri sübhanə bax!

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Türk dram krujoqu nəşriyyatı

1922

Şəhri Baku

## Appendix II

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Güllə Rəhim

Rəhim, Qazıyev Rəhim-deyərək təqdim etdi

Özünü Qraçova, sanki Ceyms Bond idi !

Qəfildən unuduldu qarşılıqlı küdurət,

Məhəbbətə çevrildi iki yüz illik hifrət !

Şuşa, Laçını satıb, yaxşı pul qazanmışam,

Təpəmə güllə çaxıb, Güllə Rəhim olmuşam,

Yadımdamı Marxalda, Pavel əzəz Pavlyuşa  
Rəhimin sözü sözdür, qurbanıdır sənə Şuşa !  
Gözünə fəda olsun mənim çılgın ürəyim,  
Silahlı Qüvvələrim, Dövlətim və millətim !  
Şuşa, Laçını satıb, yaxşı pul qazanmışam,  
Təpəmə güllə çaxıb, Güllə Rəhim olmuşam,

Koçaryan, Dəmirçiyan...qısqanmayım nə edim?  
Ora səfərlərini nə ilə izah edim?  
Belə işlərdə axı ermənilər ustadır !  
Mavilərin cənnəti Fransa onlarındır!  
Şuşa, Laçını satıb, yaxşı pul qazanmışam,  
Təpəmə güllə çaxıb, Güllə Rəhim olmuşam,

Arvadın haqqında da bir qərar verməliydin,  
“Ya mən ya o” demişdim, sən məni seçməliydin!  
Bilmirəm ailəmə, yoxsa ki, sənə baxım,  
Az qalıram kəlləmə yenə bir güllə çaxım !!!  
Şuşa, Laçını satıb, yaxşı pul qazanmışam,  
Təpəmə güllə çaxıb, Güllə Rəhim olmuşam,

Qısqanırdın məni sən Etibara, Pənaha,  
Hər dəfə and içirdim ümummilli padşaha!  
Doğrudur, Etibarla macəramız olmuşdu,  
Amma ayrıldım ondan biləndə köhnə quşdu !  
Şuşa, Laçını satıb, yaxşı pul qazanmışam,  
Təpəmə güllə çaxıb, Güllə Rəhim olmuşam,

İndi kötək yeməkdən oralarım qaralıb,

Verməyə nə bir şəhər, nədə ki həvəs qalıb !  
Günlərimi sayıram, Prezident olacağam,  
Sirləri bölüşməyə yenə rus tapacağam!  
Şuşa, Laçını satıb, yaxşı pul qazanmışam,  
Təpəmə güllə çaxıb, Güllə Rəhim olmuşam,

Şəkili balasıyam, Putinə atacağam,  
Satdığımndan da ucuz Şuşanı alacağam !  
Şuşa, Laçını satıb, yaxşı pul qazanmışam,  
Təpəmə güllə çaxıb, Güllə Rəhim olmuşam,  
Şuşa, Laçını satıb, yaxşı pul qazanmışam,  
Təpəmə güllə çaxıb, Güllə Rəhim olmuşam,

Transcription of the interview with Rafiq. 03.11.2010.

Name: Song text analysis, interview with author

The text translated from Azerbaijani by the interviewer

Interviewer: Zulaim Zakariyya

Informant: Rafiq, the author

Subject: Poetry named *Bullet Rəhim* (In Azerbaijani: *Güllə Rəhim*)

Interview Date: 03.10.2010

Interview duration: Approximately 1 hour 24 minutes, (60 min + 24 min)

Location: Baku, in the car on the way to a Baku village Mashtaga

Interview: Conversation with sound recorder

Number of interviews: 2 interviews

Work of poetry found by me on the bulletin board at the Faculty of Literature at the State University of Baku. Contact information of the author was provided by the professor in the faculty who I was visiting the day I found the poetry. The aim of the interview with the author was to analyse the poetry together with him and to let the informant talk free about the subjects he self thinks is interesting to narrate.

00:10

Z: I found your poetry on the board at the Faculty of the Literature at the State University in Baku. You are not a meykhana performer. Why did you choose meykhana as a hobby?

R: I am a lawyer by profession. Meykhana is close to me because I am able by that to express my thoughts in a humoristic way. Plus nobody read poetry here anymore. It is dead. In Azerbaijan people don't read any books any more. All information today comes from Internet, news, TV, radio, papers. Who would read poems? It has been times in this country when Shah's were poets. Şah İsmail Xətai, Hüseyn Xan of Sheki etc., they were poets. They used to organise poetic

medjlises, ghazel medjlises where they were reading poems. Kings and their helpers valued that. Now this culture is dead. We live in Atom era. Everything goes fast. Thoughts are expressed in jet speed. To tell poems are not fashionable anymore. But meykhana and its medjlises are still living and we see that people still listen to meykhanas. Why? Because, it tells about current relevant subject. Not all of them but some. Other meykhanas tell about historical events, historical processes. I mean it opens some problems that interest people, concerning one certain time, generally dealing of subjects that interest folk. It always is about what is in current agenda and therefore it is interesting. That is why meykhana gives me something. I have participated in some private meykhana gatherings and my meykhanas has been read at some events, if it has been relevant. But I do not go to gatherings any more.

Z: I have heard that your meykhanas are political, in comparison to other performers. Then how does people read or perform it?

R: It circulates among people, the same way you found it at University, signed as *anonymous*. Somebody reads, invites others to read, they laugh and so on. Or I just e-mail it to friends. But I have no desire to spread it. To perform meykhanas is my way to express my protest of today regime here. When I write poetry, my heart recover and calms down and I object this way. Now you have also been here some time, you see the level of “democracy” here. It can only be compared to North Korean. It is really special case here. I hope someday academics and scholars can find what it is. What happens here is that, people are controlled by being put in the situation where they and their families are economically dependent.

For instance one newspaper here named «Musavat», it is the most oppositional newspaper. Personally I have given them two articles with some ideas. They said “no” and that these subjects are forbidden to write about. They did not give me any other information. Just there are some subjects that you should not talk about generally. One of the subjects was privatization, which were not done right after the fall of communism. During communism what government possessed was the property of the nation. But I don’t know why all of it gathered in the

hands of the communist leaders. Who ever had money or positions during the resolution took everything. They used different tools, vouchers etc. and it was not at all divided between people as it was stated. That was what I wanted to say. The editor of Musavat said to me: *"do you know what they would do with me, if I print it? They would shut the newspaper down"*. The other subject was Nagorno-Karabakh. Karabakh is forbidden to talk of. Just pay attention to the newspapers. It is the most contemporary and the biggest problem of us, and nobody writes of it. No new ideas can be suggested without permission. It seems as the government has taken this subject into their hands and citizens are not allowed to talk of it. The journalist who got award of journalism in Norway is afraid to interview me here: *"You are probably not afraid but I am, because I am the one who provides the family"*.

Z: I see. Lets talk of your poetry now. When I tried to understand the poetry it seemed very abstract to me. What is this meykhana about?

R: It is about our Defence Minister during the War.

Z: You mean conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia?

R: Yes. About Nagorno-Karabakh. Here it is called as a conflict, but it is not a conflict. It is very clearly a war, with the coalition of Russia and Armenia. It was a conflict created by Russia and it became a war. During this time lot of events happened here. Actually one interesting point: it is because of that conflict the old communists managed to come to power again. Russia used it for all it is worth. From one side managed to keep Azerbaijan under the control and fear, also keep Armenia under its control.

Z: What do you mean by *keep Armenia under its control*?

R: Using Armenian forces Russia did vast amount of criminalities in Karabakh, later many military criminalities. After that Armenian pulled them selves back in fear of revenge from Azerbaijan will come some day. In fact this criminal acts were the work of the Russians. Approximately one million people left soils of their parents, grand parents and grand grand parents. This is not a joke. We have history there, historical monuments, and cultural monuments there. Now it is in

the hands of occupants. And we can even not visit the graves of your family members. Now Armenian became also dependent of Russian protection because of it. They did great damages to society and humanity. Children were killed, women were killed, and regions were occupied. I was working in the defence office. I have been in the war at that time. I participated in the war during that time. At that time Rəhim Qazıyev was working as the Defence Minister. This poem is about him.

Z: When was he Minister of Defence?

R: 1992-1993. Only that year. I was working in the defence office. People did not know about his friendship with Russian defence minister. And Russian Defence minister took all information from him and controlled all the country with that. I am explaining it in a very simple way. It is very complex subject.

12:04

Z: Did you self witness that?

R: Yes. I personally myself witnessed that. People did not know about his communication with Russia and of all the gifts he were giving to him. People did not know that.

Z: Did you work then at Defence Ministry?

R: Yes, the same period, as a section leader. But I worked there after his period also. I did not know about it either in the beginning. When I got that information it was too late. All the strategic heights were already given to Armenia. And this poetry is expression of all my hatred against Rəhim. Qazıyev. The Azerbaijani Defence Minister [ADM] and Russian Defence Minister [RDM] were friends. ADM invited RDM to Azerbaijan. There is a place called Sheki. There is a resort in Sheki called Markhal. They were vacationing there together, were eating and drinking. Rəhim Qazıyev took lot of gifts to Grachev (RDM). It is very old-fashioned mentality. Rəhim Qazıyev, like old rulers and kings, he thought that by giving Grachev gifts that he would win the war. It is my opinion. He did not know

that the powerful country as Russia would not sell their interests in the region for some gifts. It was something like this that Russia could not keep Empire for 300 years. Probably the reason that Russia managed to keep empire for such a long time was because their officers were not unfaithful. The RDM were using Qazıyev to get information from him.

Z: Then I want to start. Lets go from verse to verse.

*Rehim, Qazıyev Rehim, he introduced himself  
To Grachev, as if he was James Bond!  
Suddenly mutual conflict were forgotten  
And this 200 years old hatred became to love!  
I have sold Shusha and Lachin and made lot of money  
I have put a bullet on my head and have become Bullet Rehim*

*Rəhim, Qazıyev Rəhim-deyərək təqdim etdi  
Özünü Qraçova, sanki Ceyms Bond idi!  
Qəfildən unuduldu qarşılıqlı küdurət,  
Məhəbbətə çevrildi iki yüz illik hifrət!  
Şuşa, Laçını satıb, yaxşı pul qazanmışam,  
Təpəmə güllə çaxıb, Güllə Rəhim olmuşam,*

Z: What does *Bullet Rəhim* means?

R: I named the poem *Bullet Rəhim*. Because, during the war he said on television:  
*If we will loose Shusha, I will kill myself. I will put a bullet in my head.*

Z: Did he use these words?

15.07.

R: Yes. *Bullet in my head.*

Actually it was after Shusha was occupied. He said: *if I don't get Shusha back in the recent future, I will put a bullet in my head.* But Shusha was gone and he did not get it back and he did not put a bullet to his head. He is still alive. I have satirised him and used "James Bond" in here. I have used it because, even if he was not any intelligent or intellectual person, he behaved like James Bond, as if



he can manage anything. As if he a talented. It was very clear later that he was just a fool.

Z: Do you also mean James Bond in a sense as a spy?

R: Yes, of course. Especially that. His relationship to Grachev was kept in secret from the people. We did not know his close friendship to Grachev. *Selling Shusha and Lachin, I have made a lot of money* is a huge attack on him. When we worked, everybody knew how corrupt he was. His brother or other employees of Defence Ministry were used by him to snap some money both from government and people.

*Z: Kocharyan, Demirchyan... What should I do but be jealous  
How should I explain your visits there?  
Dont you know Armenians are masters of it  
The paradis of homosexuals France are friend with them  
I have sold Shusha and Lachin and made lot of money  
I have put a bullet in my head and have become Bullet Rehim*

*Koçaryan, Dəmirçiyan...Qısqaanmayım nə edim?  
Ora səfərlərini nə ilə izah edim?  
Belə işlərdə axı ermənilər ustadır !  
Mavilərin cənnəti Fransa onlarındır!  
Şuşa, Laçını satıb, yaxşı pul qazanmışam,  
Təpəmə güllə çaxıb, Güllə Rəhim olmuşam*

R: Kocharyan and Dəmirchyan were among the leaders of Armenia at that time. First were Demirchyan then came Kocharyan. I have used them both here. Grachev used to visit Armenia at that time also. He had relationship with them also. But it was kept in secret. At that time it was not so hard to keep thing secretly. Also Armenians used to go to Moscow, in order to get advices or orders. Grachev with one great ability managed to keep both sides in his hands. First of all with use of irony I have connected Grachev and Rehims relationship as a gay relations, as if they are in love with eachother. That is what I mean when I say: *Mutual conflict is forgotten, love came out of 200 years of hate*. We have been under rule of Soviet 200 years. 200 years our nation have been hating them but

suddenly as if these men fall in love. This 200 years of hate is forgotten and become to love. Do you understand?

Here in second verse. How to to be jealous to Kocharyan and Demirchiyan? How should I explain your travels there to Armenia. Rəhim is jealous of Grachev's travels to Armenia.

Z: Do you mean there is nothing that could explain the sudden friendship of 200 years hatred than only pure love, personal love between two people?

R: Yes

Z: France?

R: Why I use France here? At that time France were actively supporting Armenia in Karabakh War. France at that time, not now. Diplomatically were helping them. Everybody knows it here. France solved diplomatic issues of Armenia. The main government in Europe supporting Armenia was France. I don't know if it is diaspora or what. France and Russia indeed have always supported each other, before the Sarkozy government. Socialist times, France and Russia have been each other's support, historically. I also made fun of them here, and saying then France is the country of gays. The heaven of gays is France. In Azerbaijan French people is stereotype of homosexuals. Here we think of gays when you say France. Even its national symbol is *rooster*. In Azerbaijan gays are called for *netyx*, *petukh*. In the phraseology of our country the gays are called Russian word of the word *rooster*, *petukh*.

*Z: You should also make a decision about your wife,  
I said "either me or her", you should choose me!*

*Arvadın haqqında da bir qərar verməliydin,  
"Ya mən ya o" demişdim, sən məni seçməliydin!*

R: Here also the personal relationship is in the focus. I am attacking him in personal level and say that you can not have a wife and be gay at the same time. You have to choose. As if I, Rəhim am jealous and don't accept that.

*Z: I do not know anymore whether to think of you or my own family  
you make me put another bullet in my head!!!*

*Bilmirəm ailəmə, yoxsa ki, sənə baxım,  
Az qalıram kəlləmə yenə bir güllə çaxım!!!*

R: Rəhim has also a family, you know. All this verse is ironic. Again I am making fun and say that this person has lost all control, he also has a family. Total irony when i say that I want to put one more bullet in my head, because of that. As if he did put the first bullet, and now it is time for second. I mean that sence of putting bullet in his head has no value anymore.

*Z: You were always jealous of Etibar and Pənah  
And I was always swearing to our unational king!*

*Qısqanırdın məni sən Etibara, Pənaha,  
Hər dəfə and içirdim ümummilli padşaha!*

R: Etibar Məmmədov and Pənah Hüseynov were political figures in Azerbaijan. Pənah was the Prime Minister. And they were friend with Etibar. But he was a leader of on oppositional party. The party by name "Milli İstiglal"

*Z: It is true, that we have had a affair with Etibar  
But I left him when I found out he is a old liar!*

*Doğrudur, Etibarla macəramız olmuşdu,  
Amma ayrıldım ondan biləndə köhnə quşdu!*

R: When I say it is true that Etibar and Rəhim had affair, I mean 20th of January. At that time Etibar and Rəhim Gəziyev were working together. Inderectly I am

point at that together they have done the same crime to the people. That day they encouraged people to come out to the streets and they could not control what happened. 180 people died under the Russian tanks. They made porridge out of them. In 1991, 20<sup>th</sup> of January. For Azerbaijani people that day is a day of tragedy. Etibar and Rəhim at that day knew that Russians are coming with tanks that night. Why would you think that they would not be brutal if they are coming with tanks. Just look how unintelligent those people are. I see the reason of it only in their stupidity. There is no other way to explain it. It is their ignorance. I wonder if they don't know Russian history, or our history. Don't they know how ruthless have Russia been to us during the history. Stupids somehow thought that Russia would not fire at the people.

*Z: İndi kötək yeməkdən oralarım qaralıb,  
Verməyə nə bir şəhər, nə də ki həvəs qalıb*

*Now my curtain places hurts since I have been punished  
And I have no city nor any lust to give*

R: Here I swear to him, you see, *Now my certain places hurts since I have been punished*. You see they tortured Rəhim in the jail. Hit him lot at his bottom and now he can not do gay things anymore. I mean.... There is no cities left to give, no village, nothing. Now he is retired. You know he was in the jail etc.

*Z: Günlərimi sayıram, Prezident olacağam,  
Sirləri bölüşməyə yenə rus tapacağam!*

*I am counting my days I will become the President  
To share my secrets I will find a Russian again*

R: That is because he still do not want to leave the political environment. Although He is 100% humiliated and bankrupt, still he's somehow in the spotlight. After being so much humiliated. Do you see his intelligence? One

Defence Minister. The Defence Minister who lost the war. One thing he promised that he would kill himself in the national TV and did not do that, another thing he is still giving interview here and there, complaining about some people. And he is still ambitious.... All of them are like this.

*Z: Şəkili balasıyam, Putinə atacağam,  
Satdığım dan da ucuz Şuşanı alacağam!*

*I am a Sheki boy, I will fool Putin  
I will buy Shusha back, cheaper than I sold it!*

R: It is said that people from Sheki are smart and shy. It is our stereotype here locally. And Sheki people are business minded, they buy cheap and sell expensive. They are talented. You know when an Azerbaijani reads this poetry they laugh. Since it is contemporary. People are reminded of these events and laugh. This meykhana are full of humour and irony.

Z: Yes I see. I have been reading lot of meykhanas lately and this one is quite different. Usually the modern meykhanas, artist attack each other. I don't witness any political meykhana.

R. No, there are *always* political meykhanas and it is always going to be. Simply when it is somebody they don't know. You know meykhana performers are also people. They are also members of our society. They can not say what it is in their hearts to some stranger. They are simply afraid. Say it is a wedding party and after it is finished only some meykhana performers and some of their listeners stay. And there they perform some meykhanas. I mean if there is any stranger among them they can not feel free and improvise. Plus extatic feeling they get, they can not come to that point. He can not feel free, simply afraid, for himself, for his family. Can say one thing, but not other, you know.. I don't know... Afraid of

be put in jail. Afraid of die of hunger. The regime would destroy him. You know government do not put people into the jail so easily. That is the peculiarity of our government. I hope you write this in the future. The politics of our government is different. They do not put people into the jails anymore. Because lately worlds media react easily and protect that jailed person. And government get attention from the world, and also get humiliated. The case becomes big and widely covered in media. Even prisoned journalist gets political status. It does not do favor our government. What they do now is that make the person financially dependent. They don't let him to make any money. They make him get fired from work. But even if he works, you know, nobody here can survive here on salary. You have to understand that on fair salary nobody lives here. Only Government deputies. That is the only people in Azerbaijan who can survive on wage. But also they are the people who does not need that wage. The ones who are chosen to be a deputies are already rich. All of them. There is none there who is poor. Then he/she would not be there at all. Purely 100% all of them per todays date. None of them need any wage. But they get very high wages. And the good economical circumstances are created around them. They can do lot of businesses. Expect deputies nobody in Azerbaijan can really live on wages. It is not possible. It does not exist, you understand? Did you see prices here? You know, if somebody says anything negative about government. If so, they start investigating. F.e. maybe somebody had some soil or business object the person sold six month ago, and probably possesses with some amount of money. So they do some rat-trap on him. Easily. It happens every day here. Say, they put some narcotic drug in his poket and claim that he is a drugdealer. Who can prove them wrong? They find some witnesses also. People would easily witness, if they dont want any problems with government. Ten people at least would witness against him. How can he prove himself? It happens all over Azerbaijan. Or another situation. Say, they make him fight publicly. In restaurant or cafe or something. Somebody curses or swears on him and make him to participate in any public conflict, they take him to the police office. That is it. Easily they pull out all he owns out of him. F.e. they easily claim that he will go 5 years or 10 years to prison. They say, we found a gun on you. As if... You know there is myriad ways of make somebody misserably poor here. There is no prosecutor's office, no court

functioning. All of them are connected to each other and all of them are corrupt. If you don't work for them, you will die of hunger. The interesting thing that you are allowed to criticize the government in public. But as I said earlier, some subjects should not be touched. Within that frame say what you want. But it is said beforehand that these subjects should not be considered to discuss. Who ever would talk of this subject, even by mistake would be punished. You know meykhana performers are afraid. Usually they have no high education. And since they are not in politics, they do not know what they can say and what they can not say. They are already part of a challenged life. You know in some Baku villages they still do not have gas lines and so. They are just afraid that he will be put in prison or something and he would not be able to provide his family.

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R: That is why none of them say any political texts. Especially if there is some strangers around. Political texts are said only in their own gatherings, where there is no stranger, among people they trust.

Z: In Azerbaijan nowadays there is seven TV channels. I see in these channels lots of local news and entertainment programs. The meykhana shows are in ANS and Lider TV. These are competitions usually and in the end one person wins. I have been talking to some performers and an expert on subject who says that these shows destroy the oral poetry and meykhana. What is your opinion of it?

R: All programs are entertainment lately. Only shows. Or they have news as they self want it to have. Some news are chosen, some not. They choose self. And only motion pictures and shows. Here it is so many social, political, economical issues. There is so many processes going on in the world, processes locally or around Azerbaijan. You would not have any TV or Radio program, informing about any processes within science or theories. Nobody makes these programs. Remember that one of the main aspects of our governmental ideology is to hold people occupied with entertainment. Agitation. To put people on entertainment drug. The intelligentsia here is already totally destroyed. The level is already put down. And by entertainment they syntetically lift the anti-knowledge. It is easy to control

and govern people in that state of mind. Meykhana is also in the same category. First of all, to do a show out of meykhana is to cut its arms and legs. What you see in TV is not meykhana. Only the name is meykhana. Because the one of the main three elements of meykhana, at least, can not be done on TV.

Z: What is these criteria?

R: The words should be said in free environment. It is an improvisation. It has to be said around a certain subject. For instance, on TV you make fun of your meykhana opponent, by using different word to make yourself look better, make fool of him and win the program. That is only purpose of meykhana on TV. It does not play any other role on TV. The social political critique or the informative role of it is dead on TV. plus there is another important issue meykhana's performance on TV. Of course on TV you can not get into the extatic state. It is an important state for meykhana artist. You know in order to say sharp and create spot-on poetry, the extatic feeling has to be there. Also the poetic side of it gets challenged. It only becomes some rhyming battle. Meykhana's function is not only to be a rhyming battle. I have nothing against a rhyming battle, it is just not a meykhana. There are some special moments of meykhana, to create these moments, to let the word just pour down of ones mouth, automatically, the performer has to be in a trance-like state. The limits are put for TV performers. It is not a free speech plus you can not feel any extatic feeling in front of cameras and such a big audience.

01: 00.

Z: In «*Meyxana qazeti*» I read one article that the subject and what they should improvise about is said in advance for TV programs. What do you think of it?

R: Not only that, they even get rhymes in forehand. This makes performers act as robots. The robots working for government. Say whatever you ought to say. Naturally under these condition the poet can not show or reach his potential. I think it is also a strategic policy. You know meykhana performers are popular



people. More popular than poets. Expecially young generation pays lots of attention to meykhana. There are lot of young boys who want to be meykhana celebrities. It is a political process: The governement hold young people occupied, gather them within one arena. That the only way to be popular, to be able to make some money, to have some power, you have to appeal to TV and by that government. Because the performer who appeared on TV, get popular and start to make some money. It is essential political work. To gather people around TV, to control them. You know even the best meykhana talents are dependent on go through this way. In fact if they would stay in the level of street performances they would probably have some mobilizing power. Would maybe performe some social, political meykhanas in the street. They lose this power by performing on TV. In order to minimize street performances, government gather them around TV, make them dependent on that fact that in order to be able to get some bookings you have to get popular only through TV. It is easy to controll them this way, under governmential control. Artist get dependent on TV, which goverened by our regime. They are forced to cooparate with regime, and end up on TV.

And the populars are invited to the weddings, that is how they make money. I mean for meykhana performers it is a good thing to appear on TV in order to provide family, and make living. In order to make money they agree to go under the regimes armpit. But the biggest loser here is the art itself. Principles and functions of this art die. I think in the future that new art has to have a new name also. Because it is not meykhana, I mean authentic meykhana.

Z: Yes, it is already great debates about that meykhanas name should be replaced by bedihe.

R: You know it is some truth in it. Some meykhanas are bedihes. Of course to name all meykhanas for bedihe is a mistake. I know what they are doing. They want people to hate this authentic meykhana. If it concerns only about meykhana appeared on tv, it is bedihe, yes.

Z: Why do you think they want people to hate meykhana?

R: As a said, it is a idelologic part of the politics, that people should not hear anything from other channels than governement. Only from governement and

government's TV. Do you think the nation of North Korea become like this during one day? In order to make North Koreans as they are today government systematically and accurately worked for many years that North Korean people are handicapped like this.

Z: Do you mean that it is a strategic act that meykhana is on TV and gained so much attention lately?

R: You know meykhana boys are just young boys saying lot of stuff . Young boys say whatever they want, here and there, also against government. And especially when they get some popularity or attention, appreciation they bawl even more. In order not let them create any revolution, they just hold them all together under control. It is normal and easy thing. You know, if you want to gather all chickens one place, you make some *cip cip cip cip* sounds put some seeds in front of them. And they just gather in front of you. How hard is that?

Anyway, there is no other way for that. When do you think our government would agree that you can say whatever you want wherever you want? Especially young boys. The state make them popular, and gather around itself. Also that the boys who refuse or do not appear on TV should not be popular and not get any power and nobody would invite them to weddings for gigs.

Z: What could you say about future perspectives of these celebrities and generally meykhana today?

R: I don't believe that meykhana will die as an art. It has been here for thousands of years, it is not going to die. But maybe more twofold than it is today. More authentic meykhana. Folk meykhana which is created among people, loved by people. And other created by government, the meykhana which is created synthetically and made as popular culture. It is not going to die, it is on our blood. Each time we have some chance we improvise some meykhana verses. F.e. during Gorbachev government we had a little free-speech environment. During that short period, so many subject and events were illuminated. Now we don't have chance. We can not say what we think open but it does not mean that we will never be able to say our opinion again. Look at Saddam regime. It ended. This regime will also end. Since this regime is very much supported by Russia

and Iran, it is alive. It has been hold alive for a long time. Iran has over 25 million Azerbaijani minority, so Iran does not want Azerbaijan to develop democratically. That is normal. At the same time Russia does not want Azerbaijan become democratic state. Under democratic light the nasty work Russia have done during hundreds of years will be illuminated. Secondly If Azerbaijan gets democratic the the circle of Turkish impacts will widen. But İlham and Heydar Class, I call these people for class, they are always going to be under Russian influence. You know on top of everything Russia has vast amount of devastating material against İlham and Heydar. About Heydar Aliyev. F.e about damages Heydar has done to Turkic world. From the creating of P.K.K up to how Azerbaijani money was streaming to Russia, also about the war of Karabakh. If all this will be clear for nation, I mean İlham Aliyev mafia and the myth of Heydar Aliyev, the myth that make this system live today. It is all a lie.

Analysing meykhana the special philosophy comes out. Of course, within a meykhana, its utterance, you always touch philosophical themes and categories. But as I said there are very few meykhana artist with high education. They are simple people. They are simple young boys growing up. Talented boys, interested of art, poetics, words and music. Of course you can not discuss philosophical categories with them. But inside of what they say, how they say, you can find a great philosophy. When they improvise, they talk of established subject, thruth they know, they usually dont speculate..

Z: Would you explain?

R: When you analyse any meykhana... Oh. I should say that you should forget about meykhana on TV today. Not show meykhana. Ok? It is not even meykhana. Ok. Let me give you example.

In old days. Şixali Gurbanov was killed. I mean, he got some injection against his tooth pain, and he died. But he was oppositional during Soviet. He was just killed. During Soviet he was Azerbaijani nationalist. He was fighting soviet,

representing azerbaijani interests in Soviet. And it was a blooming and maybe most powerful time of Soviet Empire. First he become a leader of central committee and then he become one of the leaders of Azerbaijani communist party. But he was a nationalist. His was always talking of national democracy and thinking of future independence. He was also a writer and used to write of these subjects. He was absolutly not working to Soviet favor. For Soviet he was totally unnecessary. He was easily just taken out. He went to dentist and he died. But here in Azerbaijan everybody knew that he was killed. That he *had to* be killed. At that time in the street we used to say this meykhana

*They took Şixali from our hand  
They sent an artist from Moscow  
What do you think of Igor Kio?  
OHO OHO, what do you think?*

*Şixalini əlimizdən aldılar  
moskvadan artist göndərdilər  
Igor Kio, necədir sənin üçün?  
OHO OHO necədir sənin üçün?*

When you analyse this, you see the Moscow politics. Here we say Şixali was taken from our hands. Pay attention to this sentence. Şixali was needed by nation and he was taken from us by force. It says taken from our hands. It does not say Şixali was killed. What does it mean, then? It means he was a force needed by nation. If it would say he was killed, that he was killed by injection to his tooth, it would be very fact base, documentaric expression. But when saying he was taken out of our hands you see some philosophy there. And right then the Moscow sends an artist here. Look what happens here. From Şixali who was taken from our hands to artist who comes from Moscow. If it would say bla bla Shixali was killed, Moscow is bad, they make us suffer, communist party doing this and that. No, none of them. You have to figure it out self and you have to reflect to understand. All of it are understood by the artist and that is why he puts it this way.

What does it mean they send an artist from moscow? What is the point of it? So what? Indeed a great point here. First of all performer is afraid of saying what he

means. He says only they send an artist from Moscow. And how would you connect it to Şixali, who was killed? Analyse it and see how strongly they are connected. The philosophy of meykhana is in it. It is abstract it does not explain what it means.

Z: They send an artist in order to entertain people?

R: That people would not think of Şixali anymore. This Igor Kio was on TV suddenly all the time, he was a magician suddenly right after Şixali died, he suddenly “fall in love” with Azerbaijan. It did not take two days before he put a circus up in the town. Before people even realise what happened. Did really Şixali die... What happened here? And this Kio was all over the place. It was the end of the 60's. People did not even manage to react. What happened, really? Did he die? Şixali died? Before people manage even talk to each other.

Z: Was it in Baku?

R: Yes I even know where it happened. It was the building next to Medicine faculty, there was a dentist polyclinic. 5 minutes after he arrived... There was even an emergency car already. Took really 5 minutes. Just in a second they drove him away.

Shortly after, the artist from Moscow. Why performer even mention Moscow? Why that artist came from Moscow even should be said at all after the line about Şixali was taken from our hands? With these very few words you understand, what is meant here.

Z: Where did you find this meykhana?

R: Hahaha, among people. Not internet, I was in the same street corners where people performed that. You know good meykhana travel from mouth to mouth. I was an university student in the end of 60's. People just used to tell each other meykhana they have heard from here and there. And I also heard that. Meykhana is easily spread. People like them and tell them to each other. The

power of it also lies in that. I have not heard this Şixali Gurbanov meyxana self originally said, I have just heard it from boys. It is one positive sides of meyxana, it is always among people. In their mouthes. Some very spot-on enjoyable couplets are said by everyone. It is oral quality of it. It is always sung again and again.

Look.

*Smoke that marijuana, let it's smoke also spread to mountains  
Let the sleeping big shepherds in the mountains also wake up.*

*Çək nəşəni goy tüstüsü dağlara da yayılsın.  
Dağlarda yatan zırpı Çobanlarda oyansın*

Here weed, hash are praised. Smoke that weed he says, as if it is a good thing. Even the shepherds sleeping in the mountains would wake up and join our world to say meyxana.

You know this is not said by meyxana performers. It is said by people. Among the people. And everybody knows these lines. It is humoristic and very relevant still after 40 years it was said, i still remember that.

Z: It is said that meyxana performers they smoke drugs a lot, is that true?

R: There are many people smoking weed among meyxana performers. First of all smoking drugs was very popular before in Azerbaijan. If came from Central Asia and nobody cared so much. People used to think that it is better than alcohol. They smoke and get little happy and high, and they thought that their feeling and emotions become deeper and their meyxanas gets better of that reason. Not opposite. Not that they say meyxana and smoke. And words and emotions come easily and they enjoy it, especially when they gather. You know, it is normal people. There is smokers and not smokers, you find everything among people. Some drugs you smoke make you sleepy, some make you awake, some make you laugh, and some make you cry. Some awaken feelings for art, poetry and music. There are different effects. When they smoke good drug they get

extatic and say meykhana. Some of them make your talent come to surface. And if somebody who like to say meykhana gets high by smoking, he would put this into the meykhana, naturally. You know, they are always in wedding parties. They think smoking is better than drinking. If you get very drunk and smell of alcohol among people. You know most of them a practicing muslims. It concidered embarrassing but smoking is not a problem in our culture. Even they could drive a car and if police catch them there were no detectors for that. At that time they were no detectors at all but drunk person is easily revealed. Generally young people liked to smoke more that to drink at that time.

Z: What do you mean when you say at that time?

R: Until the end of 1970's the weed was cheep and easy to find. From 80's, as it is today, the business of weed was taken under the control of the government after Aliyev came, the market of it did not stop or anything but has just taken to the hands of these people. It become more controlled, expensive. Now who have money can buy it, not Bakuvian young kids anymore. It used to come from Afganistan, Central asia, by boats, from Krosnovodsk....

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